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Foucault's *Askesis*: The Ethical Work of Thinking Modernity Against Modernity

by

Mark Simon Jackson ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Philosophy

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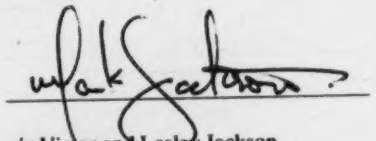

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled 'Foucault's *Askesis*: The Ethical Work of Thinking Modernity Against Modernity' submitted by Mark Simon Jackson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

The following essay unpacks the Foucauldian critique of modernity with the goal of coming to an inclusive understanding of how Foucault's critical attention to modernity: a) re-figures Enlightenment attitudes to central philosophical notions like truth, knowledge and the good, and b) constitutes an ethos of critical reflexivity which foregrounds the relational ambiguity of modernity and philosophical responses to it. The essay begins by analyzing Foucault's work on Kant, critique and Enlightenment. It moves to a discussion of how genealogy disrupts traditional ethico-political systematics. It ends by addressing how Foucault's suggestion of an aesthetics of ethics and existence both fits within his critique of modernity and challenges traditional understandings of what constitutes philosophy and the work of thought.

with love-

for Mum and Dad

my parents, my friends, my example

What forms of reason, and which historical questions, led to this?

Foucault

Work: that which is susceptible of introducing a significant difference in the field of knowledge, at the cost of a certain difficulty for the author and the reader, with, however, the eventual recompense of a certain pleasure, that is to say of access to another figure of truth.

Foucault

Working in philosophy - like working in architechture in many respects - is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things.

Wittgenstein

There is our wildest mount - a headless horse
But though it runs unbridled off its course,
And all our blandishments would seem defied,
We have ideas yet we haven't tried.

'The Riders' Robert Frost

Acknowledgements

The past three years have been trying, both for myself and for those around me. If it were not for the encouragement, good humour, and care shown by my family and friends, I might well have given up. I so much wanted this essay to be the very best it could be. Yet, it does not succeed. But maybe it is a start. I have only recently come to realize that it is but a moment in a process rather than an end in itself. I do hope that it is a simple, humble and honest effort.

I have many people to thank, for you are all my ends.

Personal acknowledgements: First and foremost, my family. My parents, Lesley and Victor, and my brother, Paul. Words fail me. You have given so much. I love you all, and can only say thank you. I would like to thank a few of my friends: Ris, for her love, encouragement and confidence; Wes, for his exquisite care, kindness and attentive friendship; Matt, for his companionship, good humour and enviable knowledge of things important and 'un-'; Brendan, for his integrity, kindness and example; Jenn and Mike, for their wonderful humour and reassurance; Paco, for his insight and wisdom; and Lynn for her gentle quietude. There are many more - to each a big thanks.

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Abbreviations:

The following are abbreviated references to some of Foucault's work repeatedly cited in the text.

OT	*The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage 1970)
NGH	"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* ed. D, Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press 1972)
GE	"On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* 2nd. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)
WE	"What is Enlightenment?" *The Foucault Reader* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon 1985)
UP	*The Use of Pleasure* Robert Hurley ed. (New York: Vintage 1985)
ECS	"The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" *The Final Foucault* Bernauer, Rassmussen eds. (Cam. Mass., MIT Press 1987)
TS	*Technologies of the Self* Martin, Gutman, Hutton eds. (Amherst: University of Massacheusetts Press 1988)
AT	"The Art of Telling the Truth" *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* L. Kritzman ed. (London: Routledge 1988)
WC	"What is Critique?" *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions* James Schmidt ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press 1996)

Part I:

Introduction

The old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.

Antonio Gramsci

> I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or 'manufactures' something that does not as yet exist, that is 'fictions' it. One 'fictions' history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one 'fictions' a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth.
>
> Michel Foucault

I : Homo Fabula

We are confined to the ambiguous fictions we tell about one another, about ourselves, about the world, and about the contexts that give meaning to our lives. To pretend otherwise - that is, to arrogate to our desires a future necessity of certitude, a reduced objectivity of technical mastery in the name of historical unification - is, in Kundera's words, "...to judge before [one] understands;...chasing after the future is the worst conformism of all, a craven flattery of the mighty."[1] Such flattery has, since Descartes, usually sworn its desires in the form *Sapere Aude* ! Indeed, that humanity's *Geist* may be realized *qua Wissenschaftlehre* has been one of our more beguiling fictions. The classification *Homo sapiens sapiens* - wherein to know is to be certain, as accepting the dare is to be a "man" - is arguably *the* arrogated *episteme*-ic conceit of the Enlightenment.[2]

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1. Milan Kundera *The Art of the Novel* trans., Linda Asher (Harper Collins: New York 1993) p. 19

2. "Before the end of the eighteenth century, *man* did not exist...[h]e is quite a recent creature, which the demi-urge of knowledge fabricated with its own hands less than two hundred years ago... ." Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Vintage: New York 1970) p. 308; - *episteme* is a phrase in the Foucauldian lexicon which denotes: "...the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences and formalized systems." see *The Archaeology of Knowledge* , trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (Pantheon: New York 1972) p. 191; see also *The Order of Things* p. xxii

Narrative constitutes our coping, and renders possible how it is we flourish. 'Fictions' are both the mythic frames and the 'conditions for the possibility' of our varied capacities. Through always open and productive narratives, we discursively forge thought in fluid, ever present, "actualities" of practice.

Narratives have continually changed throughout the courses of history, and with these changes so too the values by which we enscribe our individual and collective identities. Yet, if stories are vast repositories of values for cultures, then presumably, by changing, modifying or re-telling our 'fictions,' we could thereby re-narrate the values, attitudes and activities in terms of which people have come to construct others, and thus their own contexts, in the world. This essay is an attempt to examine how it might be possible to re-think, and thus re-tell, ethical approaches to narratives, which, as constituents of the West's present situation, are not merely telling forms of being, or attitudes of consciousness, but ones which legitimize, and morally sanction, practical forms of ethical activity. Such tales are framed in a politics of morality which proselytizes a kingdom of ends in whose truth, coping, is increasingly at odds.

A multiplicity of traditions are inscribed within narratives which, as they constitute the Enlightenment, construct specific ethical and political practices. Since the early seventeenth century, Enlightenment narratives have increasingly, and primarily, constructed the theoretical substantiation of their practical engagements in two ways, both of which premise their possibility in truth conversing with itself. First, methodologically reified truth is rendered judge and arbiter, and thus sanctioner, of belief - the *veritas ontologica*. Within the search for truth, we continue to prioritize identity as the singular datum of investigation. The Cartesian *cogito*, together with Kant's fully transcendentalized turn to the autonomy of the noumenal self, continues to reify contemporary discourse about both the public and the private of 'man.' Second, we orient 'subject analysis' to the task of unveiling the identity or the individual as a definable natural form, for instance, a "human nature." Either, a) we empirically describe the functioning of cultures and social relationships by appealing to first principles and truths of human nature, or b) we speculate as to the ways in which a society *should* function by appeal to, if not apodictic certainties of human nature, then naturalized probabilities. In either case the primary goal of analysis has become truth's ability to describe human and non-human being.

Contemporary structures of government, science and technology flourish within institutionalized ethico-political practices, practices premised on the rationalized legitimacy of an intrinsic, natural, 'order' of knowledge, right and the subject. From this "first knowledge" we reconcile our attempts to adequate or perfect a place in creation - "...the promise that one day the subject - in the form of historical consciousness - will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode."[3]

Though it is often argued that the Enlightenment appropriation of the philosophical discourse is long over, I want to situate the present essay within a discourse that contends the continuing proximity of an Enlightenment onto-politics. As such, I will situate the following within an increasingly familiar attitude of thinking, one that Levinas describes as:

> ...a mode of thought that cannot be reduced to an act of knowing in which truths are constituted - in which this or that thing, showing itself within the consciousness of an *I*, presents or maintains its being in the objectivity or exteriority of appearance, borne by the impassive identity of this *I*.[4]

I want to struggle with the narrative of epistemic subjectivity, a narrative whose politics is shrouded by a veil - a metaphysical mask - of morality, one which speaks: "...the equal dignity of each and every soul,... is independent of the material and social conditions of people."[5] This mask conforms and thus "...flow[s] from a theory that affirms, beneath individual differences, an analogy based on 'psychological constitution.' "[6]

The parameters of modernity's conversation continue to increasingly delineate who we are as reflective subjects. We continue to be defined within a moral economy of truth whose legitimacy is prescribed by the seemingly impervious nature of individual agency, agency as the naturalized "...logic that

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3. Foucault, "Introduction" *The Archaeology of Knowledge* p. 12

4. Emmanuel Levinas, "Preface"*Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford University Press: Stanford 1994) p. 1

5. Emmanuel Levinas, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Autumn, 1990) p. 66

6. ibid.

still commands the individual through the necessities of the genus and the species."[7] How are these limits of agency necessary? How is their necessity maintained? Of what necessity, and with what purchase, do these limits plumb the possibilities of our being? Is it possible to think of ourselves in a way other than that already defined for us by the unique light of our "true" reason? If it is possible to change the stories, then it must also be possible to change the story tellers. But, what are the consequences within such changes to a *sapiens*' cherished place in being? And what might these changes, as speaking possibilities and practices, say about our living with others?

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Ineluctably, the *sapiens sapiens* is reflectively aware. We are aware both of 'others' - 'ourselves,' nature, other people. And we speak of ourselves *qua* subjects in terms of the structure and effect with which awareness mediates the tensions between thought and the other. Reflective thought is constitutive of the environmental and social contexts within which the practice of relating manifests itself. As constituents in the contexts with which we construct our understandings of the world, we are participatory agents; and thus, we speak of ourselves as subjects in a progress of coping.

As subjects, we are of, and in, a modern age - an age in which, by modernist accounts, our essential vocation, reason, should ultimately prevail.[8] Our cultivated capacity for principled investigation promotes a notion that, in Nietzsche's words, "...pretends to be able to fathom the inner-most essence of things with the aid of causality."[9] Thought identifies and probes both the intimate and the public concerns

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7. ibid., p. 3. Foucault writes: "Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations - or conversely the complete reversals - the errors, the false appraisals,...it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents." in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" p. 146

8. "This principle of humanity...is universal, applying as it does to all rational beings as such. ...[I]n it, humanity is conceived...as an objective end - one which, be our ends what they may, must, as a law, constitute the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends and so must spring from pure reason." see Kant, Immanuel., *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals* , "The Formula for Autonomy" § 431, trans. H.J. Paton (Harper Torchbooks: New York 1964) p. 98. In other words, we are subject to the moral law only because it is the necessary expression of our own nature as rational agents.

9. Fredriche Nietzche, *The Birth of Tragedy* trans. W. Kaufmann (The Modern Library: New York 1968) p.112

of human life, as well as that which resists physical and conscious awareness, namely an 'outside,' or nature. The natural world's wonderous diversity and mysterious complexity is successfully conceptualized as "object," reduced to an identity, said to be knowable - often to be known - and most often understood as a resource for our potential use and supposed benefit.

While what I have just said may be hyperbolic and simplistic, it is nevertheless an overwhelmingly common attitude that the natural world and humanity's place in it is capable of being illuminated and truthfully identified through our constitutive, natural, unique and fundamental capacity for reasoned, and "therefore" reasonable, thought. What our Enlightenment tradition has thus promoted is not *so much* an unassailable security with respect to the contents of knowledge. Kant's courage in challenging the optimism concealed in the essence of logic's supposed *aeternae veritates* was certainly a mitigation of both Newton's and Descartes' still volatile optimism. Rather, the Enlightenment's deification of reason as the sole means of reflective practice promotes an *attitude to*, and way of, seeing the world - a mode of relating to contemporary reality. More importantly, it has constructed an ordered account of conscious doing - order either in the sense of: a) a command emanating from a law of nature or transcendental subject, or b) an order of design or *telos* towards which action should progress. Both conceptions have been reciprocally involved in contemporary modernist narratives.[10] As praxis, order secures a means of actively constructing the world as manifestation for subjective and individual consciousness. And so, a refined practice of progressively generating and instantiating rational ideals makes possible the notion of ever more legitimate and essential social spaces wherein the systematic unity of knowledge eliminates myths of false authority, thereby establishing incontrovertible grounds for the flourishing of freedom, justice and truth.

Throughout the history of philosophy, and perhaps most obviously since the ascension of scientific methodologies in the 17th and 18th centuries, our prevailing 'fiction' has been to discover the positive foundations of the rational self in a natural world. The physical sciences have been the methodological paradigm of knowledge by means of which the rest of culture must measure itself. The assumption is that by distilling the truth of discovery, and rationalizing an equanimity of social justice, we

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10. see William E. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative* (Sage: Newbury Park 1993) p. 34-5

will finally inhabit a lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of unity, of freedom, authenticity and essentiality: truth *qua* method is ours for the taking.

No longer deferring to divine wisdom and the will of God for determining ethical possibility, our late-modern, technologically secular society has provided, since the beginnings of Enlightenment thinking, philosophical justifications for ethico-political action in the form of naturalistic explanation, the secularization of the sacred and the culmination of human freedom in truth. Human beings and their contexts are certain knowable kinds of things. It is by knowing how these kinds universally function, as components within complexes of human and non-human realities, that we generate basic rules and procedures for moral activity.

Modernity's theoretical struggle has become one of rendering the legitimacy of rational principles for understanding, principles which will permit us to identify the real, and to adequately, if not perfectly, conceptualize the problems of scientific knowledge. It is supposed that correlating our individual and social lives, and progressively grounding our ideas prescriptively and scientifically, will give us access to the 'good life.' For what other reason could we legitimate our stampede for progress? The moral life, it is therefore suggested, may be *attained* through binding principles of conduct which are justified via a rational illumination of the essential human subject as a specific kind of thing.

As part of the positive attempt to theoretically underpin what experience, as subjectivity, must be, the discovery and rational instantiation of moral precepts has long been considered fundamental to a philosophical ethics; and thereafter, to a universally legitimate political philosophy. Typically, such arguments take the form of transcendental reasoning towards universal structures of political legitimation. Subjectivity provides the adequate standard against which claims to truth about knowledge and morality can be evaluated. If one cannot say what it is to be truly human, one cannot argue for one or another form of moral justification for any manner of social organization. Knowledge of experience is essential for positively instantiating theory in so far as it either conforms or fails to conform to rationalized obligations and grounds.

Conquerors, governments, and political revolutions - from colonial interventions outside Europe, to Robespierre's and Lenin's profound visions of social re-organization within Europe - legitimate practices

by appealing to narratives of humanism. Multi-national corporations continue now, within their commodified maintenance of the market as a virtue and naturalized right - as surely as Robespierre and Lenin did before - to legitimate their (violent) voices through narratives of humanism and truth. Ethical justifications for recommended courses of action often presuppose a political ideal - a *summum bonum* of the true, and of the human. And indeed, the very notion of ethico-political possibility has traditionally premised itself on epistemic legitimation. To say that one knows what constitutes the naturalized context of man is also to lay claim to a set of ethical principles instantiative of morally justifiable practice.

Traditionally, the philosophical canon has conceived itself as identifying and addressing the real and important questions about Being and being human. Moreover, it has defended the ethical primacy and methodology of these questions - questions which it claims render its project, not only evidential, but appropriately so.

Unfortunately, we are, at present, far from being able to cope with what we have inherited. For too long philosophy has seen itself as a meta-discipline capable of fixing the mantles of legitimacy to the doorway we call the future. Now the human future is itself a question. And the ways in which we continue to approach the world exacerbate its tenuity. Perhaps we ought to stay our willful attempts to build a secure entrance to the future, and instead delight in our present home. "The future will pass judgement upon us anyway. And it will do so without any efficiency."[11]

Checking our will to know entails, I believe, coming to think differently about ourselves and our possibilities. It entails opening thought up to creative possibility rather than retreating within the limitations of certainty. This entails both a dangerous and a liberating work on present figures of truth. Michel Foucault's work provides an ethical opening through which, I believe, we might be able to approach the practical possibilities of thinking differently.

II: Re-telling Written Stories

Our contemporary intellectual machinations are curious indeed. This is no doubt primarily due to the fact that we are in a reflexive situation. We are living with the concrete manifestations of the

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11. Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* p. 20

Enlightenment's diversity of intentions and perspectives, while at the same time anxiously attempting to come to terms with its destructive effects, the opposite of which we once assumed Enlightenment aims to represent. We are indeed living within a dialectic of false promises, a dialectic caught between desires of governing and not governing so much. The West's angst driven desire for control has transformed everything focused upon by 'the rational subject.' Fearfully, we instrumentalize the 'nature' which confronts us; but, as the tool of our own desires, we seem only to enhance our abilities for exploitation. Anxiety ensues. Though we no longer seem to endure our thoughts, neither do we seriously take up the task of re-thinking them. The result is a restless thinking within familiar frameworks as a way of avoiding thought about how our thinking is framed.[12]

Our position is, perhaps, only superficially a theoretical one. It is pre-eminently practical. It is practical in the sense that the effects we attempt to come to terms with are those that not only premise and structure our governments, our logics of social science, and our economics, they are constitutive of those who attempt to do the coping and the "coming to terms." That is, us; the "we" who act - as communities, as individuals, as women and men, as eaters, drinkers, lovers and thinkers - the "we" who are subjects.

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The following is an attempt to try in some way to investigate an ethics of how we might cope with those intellectual practices that limit us; with which, in our *volonté de savoir*, our "will to know," we have limited ourselves. I would like to approach this task through the work of one of this century's most important writers - a thinker, yes, and perhaps even a philosopher. The primary focus of this essay will be the work of Michel Foucault. Through his work we may come to understand, in a new way, the question of who we are at present. Perhaps, more correctly, I want to explore what the present means in the face of Foucault. Foucault is certainly not the first, nor will he be the last, to challenge us to think differently. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Dewey and Wittgenstein are all figures whose thinking thought against truth's internalized conversation.

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12. William E. Conolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1988) p. 4

Like these thinkers, Foucault has problematized both the philosophical tradition itself, and the practices spawned by such a tradition. He has called for a reflective responsibility in the act of doing philosophy, on philosophy's present and past aims, and importantly, on the possibility of transfiguring the limits proposed by our social practices and contexts.

Primarily, I would like to explore the way in which I see Foucault's work as an invaluable piece to the present puzzle of coping. The ethical manifestation of his work substantiates itself in several ways: through central, processual concepts of genealogy and critique; and through an aesthetic praxis of the self in the transfigurative work of truth-telling (*parrhesia*). These three significant facets of Foucault's work - critique, genealogy, and an aesthetics of existence - interest me, as together, they propose a path away from the naturalizing accounts of subjectifying positivity, and toward a path which opens up ethical possibilities and critical practices.

Foucault's 'aesthetic' understanding of ethical work comes out of his methodological critique of the traditional philosophical activity of legitimizing the search for origins and limits for truth. In so far as this essay examines how Foucault's genealogy attends to the question of ethics and the continual work of re-activating critique, we will see how the activity of philosophical thinking undergoes changes with respect to its intentions and ends, changes which are themselves implicated in the notions of critique and problematization becoming ethical exercises.

Foucault's work presents itself as a diagnosis. He begins the work of diagnosis by attending to the forgotten and masked dangers of our present. His historical work on psychiatry, hospitals, prisons and sexuality took as their objects of analysis the ways in which discourses of knowledge and truth created fixed boundaries of meaning and justified their actions by appeal to "external" standards of rationality and truth. What his genealogical analyses did was two fold. They problematized these apparatuses in terms of that which they denied as important, and in that problematization, opened new possibilities to approaching problems raised within the discursive locales of the objectifying practices. Genealogy does not offer alternatives to alleviating the dangers all discourses and practices entail. Foucault was never interested in offering alternatives - new and better approaches, for they replicated the same dilemmas and aporias as those

methodologies he criticized. Instead, genealogy leaves open the work of critique and questioning to the creative freedoms of subjects to make their lives, and the lives of those around them, always anew. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault describes the work, or critical exercise, of diagnosis as follows:

> [D]iagnosis does not establish the fact of our identity by the play of distinctions. It establishes that we are difference, that our reason is the difference of our times, ourselves the difference of masks. That difference, far from being the forgotten and recovered origin, is the dispersion we are and make.[13]

Through the fluid and always dangerous task of diagnosis comes a processual movement of ethical thinking. It is a fugitive and continual reconstitution of the present. The ethical sensibility of Foucault is contained in the movement of his reflexive political diagnostics. Therefore, I would like to read his work less as texts of stationary content and more as theses of movement, as nomadic exercises. In the "Preface" to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault writes, "Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic."[14] Foucault's own texts are 'nomadic.' They are reflections of Foucault exercising the work of critique as *askesis* in creating his life through his philosophy, and in refiguring philosophy's vision of itself. I will read Foucault's texts with the aim of reflecting their ethical 'content' within the productive, open-ended flow of their nomadic character. The philosophical activity becomes the doing, the process of the work. They challenge by exercising or practicing a questioning rather than culminating to an answer. From within the movement of the methodology and the processual activity of critique rises a conception of thinking as an ethical freedom of creativity.

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What follows is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, it is an exploration of a variety of themes, all of which are central to an understanding of Foucauldian ethics. Such an exploration will, I hope, focus

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13. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* p. 4

14. Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* R. Hurley, M. Seem and H. Lane trans. (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 1983) p. xiii

attention on a critical, philosophical ethos. Moreover, I hope it may indicate alternate paths of ethical possibility, paths which might help us to become more ethical with respect to the tactics of morality.[15]

The following project will consist of approximately three sections. Each section will attempt to trace an important facet of the Foucauldian critique. These sections will be sewn together by conceptualizing the philosophical *askesis* as an ethical activity of thought thinking against itself. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate how Foucault's critique of traditional philosophical methodologies and practices functions as an ethical exercise in constituting the self in responsible practice with the present.

The first section begins with a discussion of the concept of "critique." I attempt to situate Foucault's understanding of modernity and Enlightenment through an understanding of the concept of critique. It will be necessary to begin, as does Foucault, with a discussion of Kant. It is in Kant's 1784 essay, "What is Enlightenment?" that Foucault locates a unique receptivity to the bifurcation of the concept of critique and, subsequently, one of the first attempts on the part of an Enlightenment thinker to turn the reflexive philosophical gaze towards the historical present and the philosophical construction of that present. Interestingly, in a review of Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Foucault noted that all of modern thought could be read as neo-Kantian.[16] While a hyperbolic statement, it does suggest the importance Foucault sees Kantian critique as having for the present. Foucault engaged Kant's work continually throughout his career.

Modernity and its practices are often naively regarded as banishing myths of false authority and promoting a freer, more rational, progressive, and democratic approach to the contexts of being human. Against this, Foucault maps the historical terrain of our contemporary frameworks in a counter-modern mode, what he terms the "theoretico-active history of the present." Foucault's reading of modernity results in a significant de-stabilizing of tradition, so that what was once thought secure is revealed as highly ambiguous. We note in this shift in the earthworks of philosophical legitimacy, the importance, for

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15. see William E. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative* (Sage Publications, Newbury Park: 1993) p. xviii

16. Foucault, Review of French translation of E. Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, *Quinzaine Litteraire* 1/1/1966, Paris (Reprinted in ibid., July 1984); see Colin Gordon's "Question, Ethos, Event: Foucault on Kant and Enlightenment" *Economy and Society* Vol. 15, No. 1, February 1986 p. 75

Foucault, of critique emphasizing an attitude or ethos of thinking so often occluded in post-Kantian readings. Namely, that a politics of truth is produced by enquiring after legitimate historical modes of knowing. In Foucault's hands, critique becomes less an investigation into the limits of possible thought, and more a question of the attitude thought manifests as an ethical practice.

Foucault constructs his discourse through a specific form of "historico-philosophical" investigation: Foucault terms this exercise "genealogy." The second section will concern itself with genealogy. Foucault explains his use of the term:

> ...in opposition to a genesis that orients itself toward the unity of a weighty principle cause of a multiple descent, we are concerned here with a *genealogy*, that is, of something that tries to restore the conditions of appearance of a singularity from multiple determining elements of which it would appear, not as the product, but as the effect.[17]

Genealogy is situated within the critical attitude of thinking the present, and constitutes a counter-discourse in the critique of modernity. Foucault's discussion reveals not only his own Kantian heritage, but within his genealogical critique, a problematization of, and ambiguous tension with, any ethical response to modernity. The "counter-modern," or "counter-enlightenment," challenge to the often transparent authorization of tradition is less a rejection outright, as it is a practical engagement with the limits to discourse and an attempt to move beyond them: Foucault reflexively problematizes his own place within modernity. By reconceptualizing the notion and activity of questioning we may recognize the diagnostic possibility of a critical practice as ethical exercise.

The second section will also address criticisms of Foucault's work, specifically those of Nancy Fraser, Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas, and Richard Bernstein. These writers commit, as Foucault terms it, "... the most touching of treasons" in attempting to rescue "the enlightenment rational tradition." I will therefore explore how attempting to rescue the rationality of Enlightenment *Weltanshaung* misses the mark in criticizing Foucault's critical and ethical exercise as lacking normative grounds.

The last section of this text will bring together themes of the previous two in an attempt to understand what Foucault means by an "aesthetics of ethics." When asked in an interview where he would

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17. Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?" *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions* ed. James Schmidt (University of California Press: Berkeley 1996) p. 396

turn his attention having completed a book and series of lectures, Foucault responded, "I'm going to take care of myself."[18] The turn to the "care for the self" is, like the tradition he critiqued, not merely an attitude of consciousness. It is a 'form of activity.' It is an attempt to create the ethical subject in an art of living - a subject not derived from the ideal, monochrome unification of rationalization, but from a plurality working towards a freedom of possibilities: a subject practically instantiated through attention to the plural possibilities of praxis. Foucault's exercise of thinking thought against itself promotes a freedom to a form of life not subjectively supplicate to universal sets of laws. Foucault's response to the "interregnum of morbid symptoms" (the dilemma of modernity) elaborates an ethics of creativity which displaces a politics of truth with a politics of practice, struggle and care.

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III: Interregnum Diagnostica: the Fabul(ous) Homo

From his first publications in 1954 to his last, thirty years later, Foucault's works have been concerned with, "...one of the main political problems nowadays, in the strict sense of the word, the politics of ourselves."[19] His thought constitutes a significant challenge to traditional attitudes of approaching philosophical and historical issues and problems. Foucault problematizes questions and approaches to the formulation of methods and ideas which constitute the centre of modernity's pretensions to the 'progressive canon' of thought. Importantly, his ideas offer, through their own reflexivity, a means of historically reconceptualizing how traditional concerns such as self, subjectivity, truth, reason and freedom continue to be formulated and considered philosophically. An honest engagement with his considerations necessitates problematizing supposedly progressive ideals and consensual practices like democratic government, jurisprudence, scientific investigation and institutions, and capital market economies.

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18. Foucault.,"On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow's *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* 2nd. ed. (University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1983) p. 231

19. Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth, 1982" *Political Theory* Vol. 21, No. 2 May 1993, p. 223

Foucault does not provide a system of principles or methods through which we might capitalize upon proposed ideals of self-evidence. Rather, the Foucauldian exercise represents an ethical insistence on the dangers and occlusions a "positive" description of the principles of modernity and the Enlightenment elaborates in 'discovering origins' of "truth", "self" or "goodness." Foucault's *askesis* opposes itself to origins. It opposes itself to a way of looking which requires uncovering and continually exposing the *Ursprung's* transcendental traces in both philosophy and the positivistically oriented, empirically motivated, human sciences. Foucault's historico-genealogy focuses on ways of re-thinking and problematizing specifically present practices and their perceived evidential outcomes.

The importance of his work for the philosophical tradition is precisely in disclosing that the tradition not be conceptualized as a unified "Tradition", as necessarily self-affirming. The 'Tradition' is examined in terms of 'its' ruptures and dissonances, 'its' contingencies and heterogenies. So while it may be widely agreed that there are multiple strands of the Enlightenment, Foucault would argue that what is important lies in the dissonance between and among these strands. Foucault challenges philosophy to problematize the practice and thinking of thought: how might we, in relation to the "discursive practices" of knowledge, government and their legitimating ideals, come to re-think the work of thought?

Foucault's exercise or *askesis* of thought offers avenues and opportunities for reconfiguring and moving beyond what philosophy has taken for granted: the legislative ethos of programmatic explanation. His "question of ethics" situates thought in a critical space of intimating to the possibility of new forms of subjectivity and community, forms not already bound by traditions, practices of knowledge, and governmentalities - real governances - that structure and limit us today.

This philosophical engagement, this methodological reconceptualization of philosophical activity, reacts against the notion that there is "...a principle, a foundation that must be re-discovered."[20] Foucault describes this engagement as a kind of critical "curiosity:"

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20. "Nothing is more foreign to me than the idea that, at a certain moment, philosophy went astray and forgot something, that somewhere in its history there is a principle, a foundation that must be rediscovered." Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom" in *Foucault Live* ed. Sylvere Lotringer (Semiotext(e): New York 1996) p. 443

> - the only kind of curiosity worth practicing with a little obstinacy: not the one which seeks to assimilate itself with what is proper to know, but the one which allows one to disengage oneself from oneself (*en se déprenant de soi*). After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself?[21]

He argued that this critical curiosity, this "critical ontology of ourselves":

> ...has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.[22]

But, how does Foucault's "labour of diverse inquiry" enable "an historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us," and to what effect do they substantiate "an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them?" In this essay, I wish to take as my own exercise the engagement of such questions, questions which motivated Foucault's attempts to submit the philosophical interiority of subjectivizing discourse to radical critique.[23] In effect, such a task constitutes an analysis of the form and possibility of the Foucauldian "question of ethics."

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The 'question of ethics' is the central motive of the Foucauldian exercise. It is the passionate *ethos* of his thought. As a re-thinking of subjectivity, the question of ethics is not an attempt to postulate what we must be, but rather introduces the possibility of another type of thinking. It is not one that promulgates a *scientia* or systematic for moral action:

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21. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure ,Vol II* of *The History of Sexuality* trans. Robert Hurley (Vintage: New York 1985) p.8

22. Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" *The Foucault Reader* Paul Rabinow ed. (Pantheon: New York, 1985) p. 50

23. "This philosophical ethos may be characterized as a *limit-attitude*. We are not talking about a gesture of rejection. We have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative; we have to be at the frontiers." Foucault in "What is Enlightenment? p. 45. Deleuze reconceptualizes the function of the inside/outside dichotomy through Foucault's attempts to open philosophy outside itself. "But is there *an inside that lies deeper than any internal world* , just as the outside is farther away than any external world? The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside *of* the outside. ...The unthought is therefore not external to thought but lies at its very heart, as that impossibility of thinking which doubles or hollows out the outside." *Foucault* trans., Seán Hand (The Athlone Press: London 1988) p. 96-7

> "...[t]he critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating... ."[24]

Nowhere is Foucault normatively prescriptive in his ethical concern. Neither is the reader provided with a foundational or constitutive apparatus for legitimation or justification. Indeed, Foucault's "ethics" asserts that any structural explanation or systematics for pedagogy and action be eschewed. And so, "ethics" becomes something very different from what, perhaps, we, as subjects in, and of, a tradition, have become used to seeing and debating - for example, Hume's methodological attempts concerning principles of moral inquiry, Kant's deontology, Mill's utilitarianism, Rawl's liberal principles of social justice, or even current arguments about moral realism and ethical objectivity.

Through an analysis of the events, practices and actions by which subjects come to understand and construct themselves, Foucault's ethical concerns take as their motive force the exposing and unmasking of Enlightenment - what be called "Classical" - preconceptions and assumptions of normativity. Indeed, it is in this critically reflexive activity that the philosophical attitude and ethos of critique instantiates itself as an ethical and aesthetic 'exercise of existence.' In the illuminating "Introduction" to *The Use of Pleasure* , Foucault writes :

> "There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is, and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The 'essay' - which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication - is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, ie. an "ascesis", *askesis* - an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought."[25]

The task of philosophy, for Foucault, becomes a practice which bears a relationship to oneself, and, at the same time, within such a reflexivity, a relation to truth (*Wahrsagen*).[26] Thinking's critical

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24. "What is Enlightenment?" p. 50

25. *The Use of Pleasure* , p. 9

26. "I would like it [philosophical and intellectual activity] to be an elaboration of the self by the self, a studious transformation, a slow and arduous transformation through a constant care for the truth." "Concern for the Truth", interview with François Ewald in *Foucault Live* (Semiotext(e): New York, 1996) p. 461

concern is with first, the historical contextualization of the present and the subject's constitution in the events of that present; and, secondly, with the possibility of limning the boundaries of the "historical ontology" of the self, of transgressing those "histories of the present", and of going beyond them.

> [W]hat is philosophy today - philosophical activity, I mean - if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?...It [ie. Foucault's work] was a philosophical exercise. The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.[27]

The exercise of thought becomes an ethical stance through the praxis of a specific ethics as critical attitude or ethos.

> Foucault's "specific ethics" problematizes moral codes through attention to practice: -
>
> "...an experiment with the possibility of going beyond [limits imposed on us] in the care brought to the process of putting historico-critical reflection to the test of concrete practices."[28]

It peers at the present, experiments and transforms. It is partial and always already active. Practically engaged, it shudders at the arrogance of moral theorists. Always fluid, this "ethics" disrobes the dangerous piety of moralizing systematicity until the illusory skeletons of our traditions and closeted acceptances give way under the concerned gaze of critique. This ethics experiments with partial orders, and disparate structures, celebrating a plurality of possible meanings and contingencies.[29] Inventing rather than

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27. *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 9. It is interesting to note Foucault's use of the past tense in describing both the present work (ie. *The Use of Pleasure*) and his past endeavours. The "Introduction" to Vol II is unique in Foucault's book length texts for its simplicity and direct urgency of methodological explanation. Written in 1984, only a few months before his death, the Introduction to Vol. II, together with its text and that of Vol. III, is perhaps Foucault's most lucid and direct attempt to explain, to his then confused public, what exactly he was doing with the current texts, and with what he had done in the past. It is not without significance that Foucault had known for some time of his fast approaching death. Perhaps, too, it was an attempt on his part to come to terms with what he himself had done, and how he saw his own work as a personal exercise of thought and specific ethics of self-construction. Paul Veyne, a long time friend of Foucault's, describes the 'Introduction' and the two last books as Foucault's attempts "...to settle this long term debt to himself" - see p. 325-26 of Didier Eribon's *Michel Foucault* , trans. Betsy Wing (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1991).

28. "What is Enlightenment?" p. 50

29. "...I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet." Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (Vintage: New York 1970) p. xxiv

justifying orders, the task of philosophy becomes that of thinking the present. Philosophy as ethics - for that is what it is, perhaps, first and only - must attend, for Foucault, to the "history of the present".

Foucault has described in places that such an ethics is an "aesthetics", an "art of existence" and an "aestheticization of ethics." I will explore what Foucault means by an "aesthetics of ethics": what *could* this mean?; how is it possible; what forms might an "art of existence" take? Above all, I would like to situate my examination of Foucault's aestheticized ethics within his complex critique and problematization of the philosophical tradition, particularly that of modernity's historical conception. His critique is not, as has often been charged of him, one of complete abandonment, a lacuna or aporia of action. Foucault's relationship to the Enlightenment tradition, especially to that of Kant, is complicated, and at times confusing. In my engagement with his problematizations I intend to try to unpack what his relationship to the Enlightenment means for Foucault's methodological and ethical constitution of genealogy. It is only within the critique and problematization of modernity's passage that his "ethics" is possible. Indeed, the notion of critique gives Foucault's methodological and ethical problematizations their own politico-ethical force.

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One of the most common criticisms of the post-structuralists, particularly the French post-structuralists (Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and Deleuze) has been that, while their critique of metaphysics, unlike that of the positivists, does not, on their own admission, necessarily portend an end to ethics - quite the opposite - counter-enlightenment perspectives seem to be quite unable to account for how ethics is possible after "the collapse of the Enlightenment project." The major criticism, thus, of such perspectives has been a reluctance on the part of the post-structuralists to posit normative foundations for critical action. And, what they have explicitly had to say about the status of philosophical reflection has not been considered particularly satisfactory. Before I address these concerns let me clarify two problematic aspects of the poststructuralist geography.

First, it is a grave mistake to characterize the above four thinkers as somehow doing and saying the same things. This mistake is usually couched dismissively in the epithet, "postmodernism" and in the conflation of this generalization with the equally generalized categorization of "post-structuralism." Too

often, uncritical readership politics its acceptance by appeal to the "radicalness" of the so-called "postmodern" rejection of universal ideals of truth and justice, of public reason, and the techniques of social discipline. What is posited on behalf of the counter-modern discourse by both camps is the notion that the counter-modern is something "other" than the modern, that it can be all that the modern is not, that it is "non-modern" or "after-structure." Such notions themselves rely upon a linear or progressive conception of historical passage, a proto-teleological conception of human history as a movement from *mythos* to *logos*. Habermas and Rawls, like Kant, locate the political imperative of public reason in the validity of the modernist transition from the *mythos* to the *logos*. But, unlike Foucault, what liberal theorists do not emphasize enough is the normativity of conceptualizing the transition from *mythos* to *logos*, a normativity inaugurating the telotic progression to the perfection of the human condition. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* , Adorno and Horkheimer were especially adamant in understanding the "progressive" transition from *mythos* to *logos* as a constructed response, as just another means to coping, as just another 'fiction.' The myth of enlightenment, schematically rationalized in modern philosophy, is ever the more exclusionary because it does not admit to its own status as a narrative of meaning. It denies its own mythical structure and wraps itself within the cloak of universal truth, thus dismissing those stories challenging its orthodoxy. Writers designated as "postmodern" are engaged in reading the tradition more closely for what it masks, for what it professes; there is thus a demand on the part of post-modern thinkers for modernity to recognize its masking and technologies of objectivizing illusion. Post-structuralism, rather than attempting a "new beginning", insists on the limits to "positive" descriptions of the principles of modernity long elaborated as the "last word" on 'truth', 'justice' and 'rightness.'[30] Foucault's work reflects an honesty with respect to the practices of thought. Interestingly, Horkheimer's and Adorno's ethical attitude pre-figures the later French theory, and contextualizes a reflective understanding of the ethical insistence on modernity's frames.

I will go out on a limb. The now ossified debate between the modern and the "postmodern" is one of petty mis-understanding and political power-plays. The postmodern and poststructuralist emphases on removing the mask of modernity, on making more honest modernity's own historical embeddedness and

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30. see Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of the Limit*, (Routledge: New York 1993) p. 12

reflexivity, exemplifies a responsibility to history and to the process of thought facing its present.[31] It is under this aegis that I would like to dismiss all talk of legitimizing the "postmodern" - all talk of taking sides. The postmodern is often an ideological construction of either the academic need to categorize and/or refuse a challenge to the orthodoxies of thinking; or secondly, to protective residence in an identity ridden, indignant onanistic repose. What I would like to try to do is attempt to engage the present more fluidly, with the aim of revealing how Foucault opens us up to a responsible relationship with the possibilities of the perspectives with which we all too silently live.

I do not wish to be caught in the trap of what Foucault calls "enlightenment blackmail" , that is of being either "for" or "against" the Enlightenment. Nor do I want to come across as trying to legitimate Foucault: he certainly does not need me. I am interested in exploring what Foucault has to say about the question of ethics; that is, how it might be possible to understand the "history of the present" and, through that, open up practical possibilities to living in the world. I do want to argue, though, against the notion that Foucault's post-structuralist critique of the traditional 'philosophy of the subject' somehow precludes him from saying anything substantive about ethical possibility. Rather than being "for" or "against," it is a matter of problematizing accepted practices and traditions and letting the question stand as the process for practice.

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One (common) response to Foucault's disassembly of the concept of a trans-historical subjectivity, together with its concomitant notion of a search for origins, is the following: if we refrain from conceiving the originary self-identical locus, like 'self', or 'subject-object' relations, or 'Being-as-such', then we will not have suitably epistemic or constitutional criteria for normative action. This lack or absence of an originary subject renders a decision-making subject supposedly epistemically unaccountable for his/her actions. Relativism is thus considered, by critics, as a real threat. The subject would be capable neither of accurately describing the moral universe, nor of adequately prescribing legitimate decision procedures for

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31. see Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1993) *passim*, but esp. pp. 1-36

moral complexes. Lost would be the substantive meta-investigation discerning criteria for action or judgment.

Important critics of Foucault, like Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser, Jürgen Habermas and Seyla Ben-Habib, have argued that Foucault's genealogical method does not allow room for normative criteria for moral action, thus precluding any effectiveness with respect to his critique. For such critics, if there is no positive description or account of a position from which critique is secured (justice as fairness, consensus as inter-subjectivity), then can one say that something, say, the definition of the 'normal' through a *scientia sexualis* , is ethically problematic? Fraser writes:

> "...what Foucault needs and needs desperately are normative criteria for distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable forms of power. As it stands now, the unquestionably original and valuable dimensions of his work stand in danger of being misunderstood for lack of an adequate normative perspective."[32]

A typical Nietzschean response to the worry about the lack of normative grounds might be that the concern over the loss of criteria for responsibility is rooted in fear; fear expressed through the desire to concretize and legitimize a social and moral order within a philosophical quest for truth. Foucault's less psychologistic reading is nevertheless focused through a Nietzschean lens of genealogy. Foucault tries to address wherein the notion arises that an absence of trans-historical subjectivity necessarily precludes personal responsibility? Moreover, like Nietzsche, Foucault questions the value of a morality based on normative criteria. Indeed, what are "normative criteria?" In examining Foucault's analysis of self and subjectivity we will see that the critical worry about loss of moral/political agency is mis-construed by Foucault's critics.

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My focus in this project will be on the "later" books, essays and interviews by, and with, Foucault. By 'later' I mean those works composed during and after the 1973 publication of *Surveiller et punir*. It is in these texts that the methodological force of genealogy incorporates its greatest effect. This is in large part due to the significant impact that Foucault's reflections on Kant, the Enlightenment

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32. Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions"*Praxis International* 3 (1981), pp. 272 - 287

tradition, and modernity had on his notions of critique and the ethical practice of "re-thinking thought." It is a mistake to suppose that Foucault dismissed, or rejected totally, his Kantian heritage. The ethical part critique played in constituting his thinking prior to either *Discipline and Punish* or *The History of Sexuality:Vol 1* , (the latter published in French under the title *La Volonté de Savoir*) manifests itself as early as *Madness and Civilization* (1961). Engaging with the Enlightenment and the problematics of modernity marks Foucault's entire ethos.

Moreover, it is somewhat short-sighted to characterize Foucault's work as having early, middle and late periods, each with their own separate thematic constituents. Thematic intimations in his first books, *Maladie mentale et personalité* (1954), and his *thése de doctorat d'Etat* , *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l' âge classique* (1961) are found at the ethical core of his last essays and lectures. Even in *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1969), a book that Foucault ironically came to regard as his weakest effort, and one that he wished he could withdraw, the seeds of what were to come were sown in his discussion of an "archaeology of the ethical." While the whole of the Foucauldian corpus is shot through with a paramount ethical concern, it is most explicit in his ideas post-1976. Therefore, I wish to devote the majority of my attention to these texts in trying to characterize the envelopment of Foucault's "actuality of philosophy" as the "question of ethics."

In these texts Foucault pays the greatest attention to renewing a sense of philosophy as an ethical and social engagement, rather than as a consu(o)late to *Wissenschaftslehre*. Puzzling in their complexity and profound ethical attention, these works, as I have already mentioned, are not prescriptive. They do not attempt to normatively decree, a) how to live, b) the manner in which we ought best to think of ourselves, or c) methods through which we ought to legitimate, either already ensconced behaviour, or frameworks, conditions and criteria for normative action - methods which act as templates in virtue of which we ought to derive the purpose of moral activity and discover ourselves as moral subjects.

Re-writing the story of history's forgetting opens up the possibility to think otherwise and so towards an aesthetic or ethos of individual self-making. Problematizing our historicized story is just that, a *problematique*, a question: it does not settle matters. Instead it provokes the subject to critically realize a practice of doing and creating. The 'question' is revealed as a becoming to all that can be said, and so too,

the question of ethics is shown to be both that which came before and that which is possible tomorrow. What tomorrow can be is up to each and all to create; but it can be something other than some necessity of yesterday's tomorrow. And perhaps that is all Foucault ever wanted to say.

Part II

Critique and Enlightenment as the Historical Ontology of the Present

Reason must in all its undertakings subject itself to criticism;...it depends on this freedom for its very existence.

Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (A738/B766)

> I carefully guard against making the law. Rather, I concern myself with determining problems, unleashing them, revealing them within the framework of such complexity as to shut the mouths of prophets and legislators: all those who speak *for* others and *above* others. ...[T]he object is to proceed a little at a time, to introduce modifications that are capable of, if not finding solutions, then at least of changing the givens of a problem.
>
> Michel Foucault

> For questioning is the piety of thought.
>
> M. Heidegger

One rather self-satisfied attitude to modernity speaks the following: modernity legitimately distinguishes itself from traditional or mythic world views in terms of the critical openness with which it approaches its belief systems. To be modern is to be open to questioning the limits of one's comprehensive world views. It is, *pace* Kant, to make the thinking of thought its own work. To invoke Kant's juridical metaphor, it is the task of placing thought before a *tribunal of critique*. Critique is the task or exercise - the praxis - of questioning.

Modernity's appeal to critique prides itself on de-mythologizing traditional world-views. The modern posits pre-modern forms of life as existing along a rational continuum. Those forms over and against which the modern attempts solely to speak are said to defer only to mythic narratives and therefore remain closed. They are closed for they do not admit of their frameworks, question or critical revision. When change does occur it is enclosed within the limits (internal coherence or boundary conditions) of a comprehensive world-view. Some recent liberal theory claims exactly this. As Judith Shklar states: "...unspoken and sanctified practices that prevail within every tribal border can never be openly analyzed or appraised,...they are by definition already permanently settled within the communal consciousness."[1] Jürgen Habermas agrees that pre-modern lifeworlds do not question the limits within which they constitute themselves. He states that mythic worldviews "exhibit structures that bind consciousness more or less blindly to inherited interpretations, and do not permit consciousness of the possibility of alternative

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1. Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear", *Liberalism and the Moral Life* ed. N.L. Rosenblum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1989), cited in Claude Denis, *We Are Not You: First Nations and Canadian Modernity* (Peterborough: Broadview, 1997) p. 155

interpretations to arise."[2]† Modern narratives however - narratives Habermas and Shklar see themselves as promoting - distinguish themselves, as modern, by placing at the centre of their reason-giving practices the ethical primacy of the question as an openness to critique.

If there is any merit to Heidegger's assertion that "questioning builds a way," then critique as question and task should continually open thought to possibility. All too often, though, thought has been hijacked by the politics of truth. Modernity's intractability before the regulative ideal of truth requires specifying knowable limits necessary for an autonomous subject's capacity to cope with uncertainty and

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2. See *Theory of Communicative Action Vol.* I, p. 62 - 70. If only the modern is characterized by its reason-giving justificatory procedures, should such a characterization of the modern attitude not also include the earliest philosophical efforts (in the West) by the Greeks? If thinking thought against itself is a characteristically modern endeavour, surely then, the Greeks were participating in some form of 'enlightenment'? I do not think such a question is as far fetched as it sounds. Though this constitutes a substantial discourse all its own, Adorno and Horkheimer argue in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that the practice of "enlightenment" (small 'e', to distinguish it from the historical period of the 18th century, the "Enlightenment") began with the first movement, by the Greeks, away from *mythos* to *logos*. "The revelation...of the Enlightenment as an historic principle made it possible to trace the notion of enlightenment as progressive thought, back to the beginning of traditional history." (44) See "The Concept of Enlightenment" and "Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment" pp 3-80 (New York, Continuum: 1993).

† This characterization of the movement from pre-modern to the modern is probably too facile. While there may be some merit in using "the question" as a means of characterizing the movement from *mythos* to *logos*, such characterizations cannot account for the dialogical, open relationship of recent and contemporary "non-Western" cultures to historical influence; ex. Canadian First Nations. These cultures have met modernity, been savaged by it, and yet continue an open and dialogical relationship between it and their traditional belief systems. The trouble with Habermas' reading of the distinction between modern and pre-modern is that it reads boundaries as fixed and static. It does not address *how* limits, perceived as limits, are dynamically constituted. Contemporary cultural plurality illustrates that boundaries are fluid and dynamic. Habermas' dualism perpetuates what Foucault called "Enlightenment blackmail" - that is, having to choose between either being for the Enlightenment or against it; see "What is Enlightenment?" (1984) pp. 43-45. Foucault contends that "we must free ourselves from the intellectual blackmail of 'being for or against the Enlightenment,' we must escape from the historical and moral confusionism that mixes the theme of humanism with the question of Enlightenment....We are not talking about a gesture of rejection. We have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative; we have to be at the frontiers."(45) In other words, we need, as Claude Denis puts it, "to entertain the possibility of taking the Enlightenment sideways,...or as Oliver Wendell Holmes suggested, of rejecting both horns of the dilemma by moving to another plane" (p. 158). For an illustrative example of such an attempt, see Denis (1997) *passim* esp. Chapter 7. There remains with me, though, the pessimistic intuition that modernity's rapacious monochromania, no matter how self conscious of its own will to knowledge as itself a problem, will nevertheless lead to 'the fully enlightened earth radiating disaster triumphant.' "Modern man is the animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question." (*History of Sexuality Vol I* . p.143) Part of my aim here, however, is to emphasize Foucault's recognition that a hyper-pessimism does not preclude us from trying to cope and to think differently; that the refrain of the totality and our powerlessness in the face of it is not all a critical politics can muster.

complexity. Demanding answers (truth) and claiming certainty (justification), the modern reposes in the comfort of 'evidence' (legitimacy). It is in terms of this appeal to known truths about the world that the Enlightenment attempts to render transparent the mysteries about the world and self celebrated by non-modern, mythical world-views.

The consummate effect for thought is the development of a hegemony of epistemic cognitivism, a "first philosophy" grounding the whole of thought and action. Much of philosophy and contemporary political practice is focused, thereby, on erecting knowable limits whose claims evince indubitable legitimacy. This prerogative is born of the post-Kantian effort to determine matters of epistemological warrant, and thereby secure rational self-constitution. The result for ethics and politics has been an insistence that ethical legitimacy is possible *only* by appeal to abstract, universal, and neutral, normative grounds and procedures necessary for human flourishing. This is as narrow a perspective on thought and consciousness as that which Shklar and Habermas castigate in speaking of "tribal borders."

Foucault argues that the challenge modernity presents to our current situation is not that of replacing one certitude (*évidence*) with another, but of cultivating a concern[3] for the conditions under which things become "evident," cease to be objects of critical (ie. questioning) attention, and thereby lodge themselves fixed, necessary, and unchangeable in our conscious lexicon of lived possibility.[4] Foucault's work is, if you will, a questioning concerning thought.

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3. **Concern**: *v.* **5.***trans*. To engage the attention of; to affect with consideration, care or solicitude; to trouble.; **6.** To bring into relation, cause to have a part or share *in*; to engage, implicate, mix up; **b.** refl. *To concern one-self*: to interest oneself with, to do a thing; to engage, take up or trouble oneself; **8.** To be under the responsibility or obligation, to have it as one's business to care. - *Oxford English Dictionary* . Heidegger's conceptions of concern and care were undoubtedly of importance for Foucault. "Concern itself is but a mode of being of care...[C]are *qua* structure of Dasein is Being-in as concern. Caring as it is in the world is *eo ipso* concern." see *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Trans T. Kisiel (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1985) p. 294. An interesting study needs to be written on the links between Heidegger's conception of care and Foucault's understanding of care as it manifests itself in *The Care of the Self.*

4. Foucault favourably invoked Merleau-Ponty's dictum of the philosophical task, "never consent to be completely at ease with what seems evident to oneself" in describing the challenge he sees facing the question of the modern and the present. See "Pour une morale de l'inconfort" in *Dits et écrit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994) vol 3. A useful discussion of this, as yet untranslated, article may be found in Paul Rabinow's 'Introduction' to the first volume of the new collection of "Essential Works 1954-1984", *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997) pp. xvii - xx

Foucault rethought philosophy itself. Philosophy, for him, was to be: first, a reflection on how the limits of thought and action are historically instantiated; second, a reflection on the ways in which the thinking subject has been constructed by these delimitations; and, third, a reflection on how one may attempt subjectively, and thus publicly, to transfigure these conditions. He was adamant that philosophy's work not consist solely in the offices of epistemic legitimation. Following Nietzsche's characterization of the ambiguity at the heart of the Enlightenment impulse, Foucault sought, thereby, to align himself with a philosophical exercise which sustained the critical "attitude" of Enlightenment as both political task and ethical exercise.

Foucault problematized the methodological delimitation of possible horizons by re-thinking critique. He thereby reflexively continued a critical ethos set out by Diderot and Kant. He questioned the epistemic, methodological appeals to legitimacy, stating that such delimitation occludes the ambiguity of modernity's conditions for simultaneous decline and progress; what Kundera calls "the seed of modernity's end in its beginning."[5] By subjecting critique to historical analysis, and subsequently, by re-reading the possibilities of modernity's Enlightenment onto-politics (ie. critique), Foucault thematized a practical ethos in a critical attitude to philosophy and living.

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I would like to begin by exploring the following. Foucault problematizes the predicament bequeathed to thought by Kant's inauguration of modernity. This predicament follows from the task of Enlightenment as self-constitution. Kant's modern innovation made freedom a transcendental condition for the possibility of ethics. 'Practical reason', for Kant, is that form of thought which we use to make our lives ethical. But, as it is not governed by natural necessity, we are free to make ourselves in accord with its principled form. Kant separated laws of nature and laws of freedom, yet made as the condition for right action our experience of the rational law. Foucault abandons Kant's distinction of rational realms and transcendental methodologies, but attempts to re-read Kant's generative notion of freedom as an "ontological condition" for an "undefined work" that opens new possibilities for work and practice. Where Kant saw

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5. Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* p. 4.

mature (enlightened) comportment in accord with experiences of rational law, as the telos for autonomy's abode beyond the bounds of irrational human vagary, Foucault concretized freedom as a labour or exercise of self-making. Freedom, thus, is not a state rationally dispossessed of domination, but the historical recognition that one may question the historical conditions that manifest the present; and that therefore, a "way" is open to being otherwise. For Foucault's critical theory, freedom is the practical labour of this opening.

Foucault read the Kantian question of self-constitution (Enlightenment) as a tangle of contingent and competing evidences, and thus in terms of its multiple possibilities. He began by looking at 'critique' and its constitutive role in methodologically instantiating *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment). Like Heidegger, Foucault sees critical reason as constructing the absence of traditional, religious and rational grounds for understanding ourselves in the world. Kant attempted to overcome this conceptual lacuna by marrying the problem of self-constitution with a critical philosophy of delimitation. For Kant, the regulative ideal of pure reason organizes reality in a teleology of progression.[6] Post-Kantian enlightenment critique has subsequently continued the practice of delimitation by attempting to prescribe the conditions under which freedom may be manifest. The result, Foucault claims, is a "...rancorous will to knowledge,"[7] whose attempts to prescribe and legislate specific truths of reason, subjectivity and morality have led to our 'current danger.' What's more, modernity is caught in the philosophical dilemma of forever clearing away distortions which impede the endless task of true description - a methodological bind which ignores the injustices of knowledge: "...there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation to truth."[8] Foucault's critique of *Aufklärung* is echoed by Gianni Vattimo: "...the idea of thinking the course

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6. H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 259

7. M. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* ed. D. Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1972) p. 163 - hereafter NGH

8. idem.

of history in terms of an *Aufklärung*, of a victory won by reason over the shadows of mythical knowledge, has...lost its legitimacy. Demythification is therefore itself considered a myth."[9]

Foucault took as his work "the historical analysis of this rancorous will to knowledge," and attempted to reconvene, within the Enlightenment task of self-constitution, a critical attitude of practical possibility - "a philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as a work carried out by ourselves as free beings."[10] Foucault argues that 'critique' and a critical attention to self-constitution (Enlightenment) do not necessarily entail detailing, in the now characteristically legislative fashion, the purchase of truth. Self-constitution does not necessarily require obeisance to epistemically delineating truths of subjectivity and rationality. Moreover, our critical tradition can support 'taking the Enlightenment sideways,' by re-engaging a critical attitude of resistance. Foucault's analysis shows that there is, in the tradition of the West, the basis for an ethical life that does not take legitimate description as its consummation. His analysis of our tradition - both modern and ancient - attempts to show that there are different provisions for the ethical life than those forms presaged by the economy of choices we currently take for granted.[11] More specifically his work suggests a complex relational ambiguity within the modern quest(ion), an ambiguity not to be feared and overcome, but an ambiguity to be faced.[12]

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9. Gianni Vattimo, *La société transparente* (Paris: Desclée de Brouver, 1990) p.17 as quoted in Karlis Racevskis *Postmodernism and the Search for Enlightenment* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia 1995) p. 66

10. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?"*The Foucault Reader* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) p. 47 - hereafter WE

11. see Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983 pp. 253 - 64

12. "Is it certain that the ultimate and proper meaning of the human signifies in its exhibition, in the manifestation of the manifested for *myself* (which is the way this meaning is thought) in a guise of a thought revealing the truth of being? Is it so certain that man does not have his meaning beyond what he can be and what he can show himself? Does that meaning not show itself as meaning precisely as secret of the face-open, that is, exposed without defense?...Face or autochthony. The consciousness of that inassimilable strangeness of the other, the bad conscience of my responsibility, the bad conscience of that difference of the non-addictive other and of that non-in-difference-for-the-other-in-me (or of my "me") - that is no doubt the very meaning of the face, its original speech. In it there can be heard the demand that keeps me in question and elicits my response and responsibility.... A meaning...beyond what man can be and show of himself: the face is the meaning of the beyond....The meaning of the face is not a species whose indication or symbolism would be the genus. The face is alone in translating transcendence. A

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Foucault's work begins as a diagnosis of what he calls our "current danger." He interprets our danger as the modern *volonté de savoir* (will to know) whose concern for the truths of individuals *qua* 'deep selves' obliges us to ground norms in science, religion and the law. Foucault uses the term 'bio-power' to describe those discursive and practical technologies whose confluence has produced our present. Our present he translates as the product of Christian technologies of self-decipherment (confession, absolution, denial, etc.) and Enlightenment technologies for the rational policing of populations (psychology, criminology, police, medicalization, digital information economics, insurance, therapeutic counselling, etc.). He argues that subjectivities are produced within these knowledge apparatuses; and further, that subjectivity-as-self-knowledge sustains the very apparatuses whose animation necessitates a subjects' action. For post-Kantian thought, finding indubitable limits (truths) of self making sustains the discourse of rational maturity.

Foucault claims, however, that *within* those currents of Enlightenment thinking which attempt to stipulate the form of "the Kantian question...that of, knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing"[13] there is an important ethical *attitude* to thinking, an attitude reflected through the ethos of what it means to question. The object of this 'critical attitude' is "to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently."[14] More than simply theorizing limits, critique exemplifies a practice which, by attending to the present as difference in history, questions limiting structures. It is this mode of critique that allows us to 'come at enlightenment sideways.' This critical "attitude" is often elided in contemporary philosophy, yet is brought to the forefront by Foucault's re-thinking of modernity, and exemplified by his critical histories of present limits. Re-appropriating this central attitude of modernity enables a practical opening to the possibility of transfiguring present limits. Critically clearing a continual opening to possibility sustains an honest, and a

Transcendence that is inseparable from the ethical circumstances of the responsibility for the other, in which the thought of the unequal is thought, which is no longer in the imperturbable correlation of the noesis and the noema, which is no longer the thought of the same. But as non-transferable responsibility, it has received its uniqueness of self from the epiphany of the face in which a different requirement than that of the ontologies is taking on meaning." Emmanuel Levinas, "The Meaning of Meaning", *Outside the Subject* trans. Michael Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) pp. 94-5

13. WE, p.45

14. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage 1990) p. 9 - hereafter UP

responsible, philosophical attitude to historical being. Foucault wants to argue that, though he is "undecided as to whether or not the critical task still entails faith in Enlightenment,...the thread that connects us with the Enlightenment is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements, but rather the permanent re-activation of an attitude - that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era."[15]

Modernity has been as much the effort of casting off "the fetters of an everlasting immaturity"[16] as it has been that of finding a lasting maturity in rational limits; as much "a critique of what we are saying, thinking, doing, through a historical ontology of ourselves" and so "a philosophical ethos characterized as a *limit attitude*."[17] Foucault understands 'limit' to mean any interaction with the world ('saying, thinking, doing') in terms of which a subject identifies a horizon of possibility, and, at the same time, understands that her practice, as a subject, is implicated in that practical horizon. Judith Butler interprets Foucault's situating subjectivity with respect to recursive horizons of action as follows: "subjects who institute actions are themselves instituted effects of prior actions, and...the horizons in which we act are there as a constitutive possibility of our very capacity to act, not merely or exclusively as an exterior field or theatre of operations."[18] In *The Order of Things*, Foucault used the term *episteme* to describe the historically

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15. WE, p. 50 and p. 42 respectively

16. I. Kant., "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" trans. James Schmidt, *What is Enlightenment?* ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) p. 59. Schmidt translates Kant's use of the phrase *selbsverschuldeten Unmündigkeit* as "self-incurred immaturity." Schmidt emphasizes the importance of Kant's use of the term *Unmündigkeit* to denote "immaturity" by referencing Kant's use of the same term in his *Anthropology*, wherein the use of *Unmündigkeit* designates both "minority of age" and "legal or civil immaturity" - see Schmidt, ct.1, p. 63. A controversy has arisen because Kant has been translated differently; for example, see Lewis White Beck's translation of *Unmündigkeit* as "tutelage" - *Kant: Selections* (MacMillan: New York 1988) p. 462. "Tutelage" seems an awkward translation, one that elides Kant's explicit anthropological emphasis on the fact that political necessity take a specific rational form - ie. the form of the intuitions.

Foucault's use of the term "*minorité*" in translating *Unmündigkeit* recognizes Kant's political emphasis on the subject's capacity to progress to *Aufklärung*. Kant's anthropological and humanist politics was not lost on Foucault. Foucault was intimately familiar with Kant's *Anthropology*. He translated the *Anthropology* in 1961 in partial requirement for his *thèse complémentaire*. In all his essays addressing Kant's 1784 text, most importantly "What is Critique" (1978) and "What is Enlightenment?" (1984), Foucault uses the term *minorité* consistently.

17. WE., p. 45

18. Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations", *Feminist Contentions* (New York: Routledge, 1995) p. 43

manifest conditions for the possibility of knowledge in terms of which configurations of knowledge act as intelligible limits for thought. An *episteme*, he argues, is the "historical *apriori*" on the basis of which certain forms of knowledge have become possible as domains of intelligible discursivity.[19]

What characterizes the modern *episteme* is the tension within polarized rational possibilities: between 'horizons' manifested, on one hand, by the truth of discourse defined on the basis of the truth of the object (natural knowledge), and, on the other hand, a truth proceeding from formative discourse (the promise of history). By placing 'man' as the constitutive centre of this choice, the modern is thus caught in an endless struggle to justify a subject that is both empirical locus of knowledge (*savoir*) and an immediate, self-identical 'present-ness' for possibility. The problematic modernity has constructed for itself is that of finding an articulate position or vantage point from whence to anchor analysis and dispensate legitimate action. Vantage points necessitate distancing oneself from the field of action. As a critical orientation, they methodologically posit an identity of homogeneous duality between subject and object.

For Foucault, however, in order to establish an ethical relationship to the present - to things, to others and to oneself - one must stay close to events, experience them, be willing to be effected and affected by them.[20] As such, his work questions the discursive formulation of modernity's proposed architecture of stability by arguing that positing an origin of action in autonomous agency erases the historical genealogy constitutive of the subject's, and the action's, intelligibility. Foucault attempted to reflect on an Enlightenment agonal consort(ium) ambiguously torn between, on the one hand, an anthropologically motivated transcendental description, and, on the other, a telotic understanding of mature modernity as the historical realization of authentic rational nature. Against this dualism, Foucault understood modernity's responsibility to be to develop a process of creative self-overcoming practiced within the already ambivalent framework of a modernity both creating and undercutting its own possibility.

While the Enlightenment continues to be traditionally read as discovering necessary limits, Foucault's problematizations are at once radical and ambiguous. By 'problematization' Foucault meant the

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19. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (New York: Vintage) p. xxii - hereafter OT

20. Rabinow, 'Introduction' *Essential Works Vol. 1*, p. xviii

simultaneous designation of a transfiguration of historical possibility and ways of being for the self. Problematization develops domains of acts, practices and thoughts that pose problems for current political 'solutions' and means for addressing our current distress. Foucault's questions undertake the disruption of the methodological ethic of certainty which endeavours to resolve the problem of an articulate foundation. They attempt to ambiguously reflect a more complex relational strategy at work amongst the disciplinary 'technologies' of modernity's political practice. Foucault rejects truth as totalization and focuses on the exercise of self-constitution (maturity) and critique of the present as pre-eminently historical (and modern) practices.

Foucault's ambiguous, questioning relationship to Kant and the problem of modernity implicates itself through the central question of *Aufklärung*. Though the entirety of Foucault's career is marked by an engagement with Kant and the question of modernity, his addresses, "What is Critique?" (1977), "The Art of Telling the Truth"(1983) and "What is Enlightenment?" (1984) all focused on Kant's 1784 essay as the locus for understanding an attitude to the present the Enlightenment continues to propagate itself within today. They will my guides in trying to unpack Foucault's re-thinking critique.

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I. Critique: A Short History of its Task

At the height of the Enlightenment, Diderot wrote in his *Encyclopedie* : 'All are equally subject to criticism.' So too, in the 'Preface' to the 1781 edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant expressed a similar attitude: "Our age is in especial degree, the age of criticism [*Kritik*], and to criticism, everything must submit."[21] ..... But, what is 'criticism'? What is meant by critique?

Though the idea of 'critique' is a product of the Enlightenment, the term is older still. Paul Connerton notes the first unique use of the term by Humanist and Reformist descriptions of the art of informed judgement appropriate to textual analysis, specifically the Bible.[22] Criticism developed as a technology by which to demonstrate, for Catholics, the appropriateness of the Church; and

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21. I. Kant., *Critique of Pure Reason* , trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan, 1961) p. 9 (Axi, a)

22. Paul Connerton, *Critical Sociology* (New York: Penguin, 1976) p. 16

correspondingly, for Protestants, to argue the moral primacy of Scripture. Gradually, the validity of argumentative appeal increasingly came less from obedience to revelation and ecclesiastical decree, and more from the questioning criteria of rational, secular - most often scientific and materialistic - 'critical thought.' "Critique came to be seen no longer as simply a symptom of the sharpening opposition between reason and revelation. It was viewed as itself the activity which separated the two spheres."[23] Critique transformed itself as a secularized task for thinking. The processual appeal of reason extended judgment to all realms of life. Eventually, the expansion of the critical (questioning) attitude led to the separation of faith and state. "The activity of critique became first indirectly, and then directly political. ... Neither religion nor the legislature was exempt from its test."[24] Critique became, thus, an activity of problematizing historically present modes of structured means for coping. Material social manifestations, including structures of work, institutions of law and family, forms of care and constructions of subjectivity were deemed open to revision and subject to continual scrutiny.

Critique first premised its authority on a permanently practiced oppositional activity of challenging the apparent limits of thought and action. The historical development of a secular rationality as the central activity of criticism solidified its conceptual grip by positing a 'progress' of critique - that is, that rational thought could bring us closer to the truth about ourselves and the world. The problem then became how best to realize this progress. A dialectic arose between the problem of knowledge, and the concomitant, and increasingly important, problem of government, the resolution of which would ground itself as a suprahistorical manifestation of rational, mature thought. *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment) self-consciously developed the constitutive interplay of positivist science and systematized statism, presented itself as the profound reason and rationality of history(destiny); and chose as its instruments of influence, procedures of economic and societal rationalization (natural knowledge).[25] Within reason's "will" to provide truths as

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23. ibid.

24. ibid.; see also Foucault, "What is Critique?" (cit. n. 25) pp. 383-391

25. Foucault, "What is Critique?" trans., J. Schmidt in *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions* ed. J. Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) p. 388. Hereafter - WC

bases for judgements of correctness and incorrectness, the now thoroughly modern frame of critique became tied to elucidating the rational constellation of knowledge and government. "A whole fabric of tight relations is woven between [science and the state] insofar as science will play an increasingly determinate role in the development of productive forces; and insofar as, on the other hand, the powers of a statist type will be exercised more and more across sophisticated technical ensembles."[26] The historically constituted problematic for Kant's time was thus constituted within a framework wherein critique might provide a forum for reason to reflect on its responsibility, responsibility first to delineations of internal justification, and secondly towards its subsequently legitimate and authoritative powers of dispensation.

Historically, then, the term "critique" conveys two aspects. Critique may designate a reflection on, and description of, the apriori conditions of possible knowledge. It is this aspect that we characteristically associate with Kant's critical philosophy. Kant attempted to secure a space wherein critique could respond to what were seen as the twin dangers confronting the metaphysics of his time - unfounded dogmatism and unbridled scepticism. Kant's critical philosophy attempted to detail the limits of human reason; and, as such, construct a system whereby, what could be known, would be known within universal standards of rationality. The critical project entailed both the description of reason's limits ('the transcendental theory of apperception'), and the prescription of legislative measures for assuring the possibility of knowledge, and importantly thereafter, human autonomy. Possessing the requisite capacities, any subject could be understood to be governed by universally applicable rules or methods necessary for 'maturity' (Kant's term for 'enlightened' existence).

Critique also denotes a second aspect, one that has particular importance for Foucault's analysis of enlightenment as question. Critique may also be understood as an oppositional activity. It denotes a reflection on limits or systems of governance which are humanly produced. Critique, in this second sense, constitutes an analysis of apparent limits of thought and action in the present. It is a particular attention to the present as a historical mode of thought, a present which produces forms of reflection and practice. Even for Kant, critique is a process of questioning the present, insofar as it reflects on the historical conditions

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26. ibid.

which make up that moment. It is important to note that the problem of 'knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing' could not constitute itself as a question were it not for a preceding attitude of resisting and problematizing present limits. Criticism's transcendental (*aufgehoben*) efforts are *always already* implicated in an attitude of problematizing present limits - methodologically, a historical task, but importantly also, an ethical imperative. Critique as question is a necessary concomitant to critique as delimitation. Foucault suggests that it is the ethico-political pre-requisite. "[I]t seems that critique not only bears with it regularly enough - indeed almost always - a certain inflexibility in its appeals to utility, but that it also is undergirded by a more general sort of imperative - more general still than that of warding off errors. There is something in critique that is related to virtue." It is within this "critical attitude as virtue" that Foucault tries to communicate his own re-thinking of critique as an historical ontology of the present.[27]

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II. Kant's *Aufklärung*

Foucault's signal engagement with Kant and an Enlightenment 'attitude' as critical question and possibility was through Kant's 1784 article "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?." For post-Kantian thought, critique's meaning is situated in a constellation of relations surrounding the pursuit of *maturity* through a reflection on *modernity*, wherein our philosophical task is articulated by a gaze on the historical constitution of the present.[28] For Foucault, Kant's brief essay marked "the discrete entrance into the history of thought of a question that modern philosophy has not been capable of answering, but that it has never managed to get rid of, either." The unanswerable question of "the event that is called *Aufklärung*" has been ubiquitous in determining "at least in part, what we think, and what we do today."[29] Foucault writes:

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27. ibid., p. 383

28. David Owen, *Maturity and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 1

29. WE p. 32. We shall see at the end of the present study that the status of the question of Enlightenment as an unanswerable, yet persistent, *question* plays definitively into Foucault's ethical exercise. The practice or task instantiated by questioning is the productive relationship of the 'cultivation of the self' and the transformation of one's being and living ('the art of living').

> It seems to me that the *Aufklärung*, both as singular event inaugurating European modernity and as permanent process manifested in the history of reason, in the development and establishment of forms of rationality and technology, the autonomy and authority of knowledge, is for us not just an episode in the history of ideas. It is a philosophical question, inscribed since the eighteenth century in our thoughts.[30]

Kant was the first philosopher to frame the task of coping in this manner. Kant's constitutive question, 'What is Man?' directed our critical orientation both to the meaning of the present, and to a critical examination of reason's capacity for ajudicating mature self-constitution. His article of 1784 famously posed the problem of enlightenment as "mankind's exit [*Ausgang*] from its self-incurred immaturity," where 'immaturity' is defined as "the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another."[31] Immaturity, for Kant, was seen as a 'self-imposed' fetter. Kant admonished, as one of the limiting conditions which prevents "the vocation of free thinking", self-interested attempts by 'guardians' (scholars, police, tax collectors, clergy) to have acquiesce before them a population for whom they self-righteously assert the need to do their thinking.[32] Subjects are constructed as thinking themselves incapable of exercising their own capacities for self-constitution and freedom of thought. "It is...difficult for any individual man to work himself out of an immaturity *that has become natural to him.*"[33] And so, our self-imposition. Yet, claimed Kant, human beings have the capacity for rational reflection; and therefore, the means to engage themselves as courageous, autonomous agents in the face of so much that makes "it so easy to be immature."[34] All that is needed for this is freedom.[35] That is, sufficient space and independence of thought from the restraints of authority are necessary to think for oneself. Kant offered as motto and rallying cry to the fettered - "*Sapere Aude*! Have the courage to use your

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30. M. Foucault, "The Art of Telling the Truth" in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* ed. L. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988)p. 94 - hereafter AT

31. Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", p. 58

32. ibid., p. 63

33. ibid., p. 59 (emphasis added)

34. ibid.

35. ibid.

own understanding!"[36] His appeal introduced the central problematic for modern thought: how to think for oneself and therein attain autonomous, mature comportment in the face of the present? Enlightenment becomes, with Kant, both question and task.

Within a critical perspective which predicated its responsibility to, and practice of, questioning as an attention to present limits, Kant constructed his philosophical project as an address to four questions: "1) What can I know?, 2) What ought I to do?, 3) What may I hope for?, 4) What is man?." Moreover, it was through the fourth that he attempted to understand the first three. "Metaphysics answers the first question, ethics the second, religion the third and anthropology the fourth. Fundamentally all this could be reckoned as anthropology, since the first three questions are related to the last."[37] Kant's 'Copernican turn' towards a constitutive subject as the fundamentum of conscious being rendered the answer to his anthropological question philosophy's primary methodological task. Martin Buber beautifully expresses Kant's imperative of epistemic comportment: "What approaches you out of the world, hostile and terrifying, the mystery of its space and time, is the mystery of your own comprehension of the world, and the mystery of your own being. Your question *What is Man?* is thus a genuine question to which you must seek the answer."[38] Kant called this seeking for an answer, *Aufklärung*. Courage and confidence in the powers of reason compels each man, and the public of men, to contrive an *Ausgang* from self-imposed immaturity, a development in some way into mature adulthood.

Kant invoked, in this process of *Ausgang*, a distinction between private and public uses of reason. Private uses of reason are those that a person makes when she has a role to play in society. "The private use I designate as that use which one makes of his reason in a certain civil post or office which is entrusted to him." Yet, these private uses are only, so to speak, an obedience to a "certain mechanism."

> "A certain mechanism is necessary...in the interest of the commonwealth by means of which some members...must conduct themselves passively in order that the government may direct them,

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36. ibid., p. 58

37. From Kant's *Handbook* to his lectures on logic, as well as *Critique of Pure Reason* §A804-A807/B832-835, cited in *The Order of Things* p. 341; see also Martin Buber's "What is Man?", *Between Man and Man* (New York: Collier, 1965)p. 119

38. Buber, p. 137

through an artificial unanimity to public ends, or at least restrain them from the destruction of these ends. Here one is certainly not allowed to argue; rather, one must obey."[39]

Public uses of reason are those not adapted to certain ends, ends entailed by specific tasks necessary to the procurement of good government. *Räsonieren*, to reason for reasoning's sake, is the public use of reason, and is the free exercise of thought. "For enlightenment, ...nothing more is required than *freedom*; and indeed the most harmless form of all things that may be called freedom: namely, the freedom to make a public use of reason in all matters."[40] The task of Enlightenment (mature self-constitution) is both a public and a private obligation. It is 'mature' when the two facets cohere, when the public and private goods are both governed by the indubitability of universal reason. "Enlightenment is not... merely the process by which individuals would see their own personal freedom of thought guaranteed. There is Enlightenment when the universal, the free, and the public uses of reason are superimposed on one another."[41] "The Kantian moment is the link between the two: it is the discovery that the subject, in so far as he is reasonable, applies to himself his own law, which is the universal law."[42]

Foucault interprets Kant's legitimation of the public use of reason in the form of a contract. As the embodiment of regulative rationality, the state has the duty, writes Kant, to direct the task of maturation and the deployment of rational public ends; ends in terms of which the private use of reason is employed:

> ...only a ruler who, himself enlightened, does not himself fear shadows, and at the same time has at hand a large, well disciplined army as a guarantee of peace, can say...: *argue as much as you want about whatever you want, only obey!*...[A] lesser degree of civil freedom...creates the room for freedom to spread to its full capacity.[43]

Foucault writes of Kant's critical contract:

> Enlightenment...must not be conceived simply as a general process affecting all humanity; it must not be conceived only as an obligation prescribed to individuals: it now appears as a political problem. The question...is that of knowing how the use of reason can take the form that it requires... . And Kant...proposes a sort of contract:...the public and free use of autonomous reason

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39. Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" p. 60

40. ibid., p. 59

41. WE., p. 37

42. OT., ct. 2, p. 343

43. Kant., "What is Enlightenment?" p. 63

> will be the best guarantee of obedience, on condition, however, that the political principle that must be obeyed itself be in conformity with universal reason.[44]

Kant thus attempts to stipulate the conditions under which we construct an understanding of universal reason. The republic of men is in need of critical tools; tools of recognition, resistance and production. Kant's three *Critiques* were his suggestions for examining the rational propositions of knowledge, ethics and history. The critical philosophy of the three *Critiques* "...is necessary, since its role is that of defining the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped."[45] Kant writ large the legacy of modernity, an anthropological age we are still in the midst of attempting to clarify.

> Kant's anthropological question is shown in all clarity as a legacy to our age. No new house in the universe is being planned for man, but he, as the builder of houses, is being required to know himself. Kant sees the age after him in all its uncertainty as an age of self-restraint and self-reflection, as the anthropological age. First...he saw in the treatment of the fourth question a task which he set himself, and whose resolution was to follow that of the first three questions; he did not really set about it, but he set it in such clarity and urgency that it remained a task set to following generations, till at last our own generation is preparing to place itself in its service.[46]

For Foucault, this clarificatory work is constelled within a constitutive paradox. Let us turn to his characterization of the entanglements which constantly bring modernity up against its limits.

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III. Enlightenment Anthropologically Delineated

Kant attempted to give a rational, delineative form to the task of rational self-constitution by locating, as philosophy's focal point, the question, 'What is Man?'. If man *qua* individual could be characterized as 'freedom of will persisting in existence', then giving rational expression to "apriori" conditions for freedom would ensure universalizable self-constitution and rational autonomy.

> Kant says, 'I must recognize myself as a universal subject, that is, I must constitute myself in each of my actions as a universal subject by conforming to universal rules'.... Thus Kant

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44. WE p. 37

45. WE., p. 38

46. Buber, p. 137

> introduces one more way in our tradition whereby the self is not merely given but is constituted in relationship to itself as subject.[47]

Within the increasingly naturalized vision of man as *capaciter ratio*, the Enlightenment forged an epistemic model of mature comportment dedicated to preserving man's persistent freedom of will in existence. Yet, Foucault argues, there is ineluctably a paradox. The paradox arises in the attempt, on the one hand, to simultaneously spell out or delineate legitimate modes of government - the attempt to prescribe limits beyond which it is impossible for man to go - with, on the other hand, the expressed intention of absolving thought of restrictive parameters (authority and government) so as to give voice and action to a rational ('natural') freedom of will persisting in existence.

Foucault argues that, since Kant's "Copernican turn", modern thought has been caught in a tension between truths spoken of man in a discourse of reduction (positivism), and truths spoken of man in a discourse of promise (eschatology). Both limn attempts to describe man by appeal to 'actual' experience. "Modern thought has been unable to avoid - and precisely from the starting point of this naive discourse - searching for the locus of a discourse that would be neither of the order of reduction nor of the order of promise: a discourse whose tension would keep separate the empirical and the transcendental while being directed at both... ."[48] Modernity (self-constitution) as delimitation entails a constant tension within the limits of it own possibility. It has sustained itself in this tension because, claims Foucault, it has been asking the wrong questions of itself. Rather than asking for greater clarifications about 'man' and 'actual' experience, we should be asking after the ethical and constitutive presuppositions *behind* the question 'What is Man?' The turn to man propagates the very dualisms and tensions it subsequently tries to, though cannot, avoid. Foucault's historical analysis of critique as question attempts to bring forward and problematize some of the pre-suppositions behind Kant's (modern) anthropological quest.

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47. M. Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* 2nd. edition, ed. H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 252 - hereafter GE

48. OT., p.319

Foucault's considerable engagement with Kant's anthropological question 'What is Man?', began in 1961 with his French translation of Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Intended as a "prehistory of that question," his subsequent study, *The Order of Things*, is his most focused treatment of the question What is Man?.[49] Against what Kant took to be neutral empirical observations about man, Foucault problematizes the centrality of the autonomous subject and the dual orientation of subjectification/objectification that Kant's constitutive anthropological question requires (and entails) for philosophical methodology.

Foucault traces the flux of discursive *epistemes* (models of representation) since the sixteenth century, and concludes with an analysis of modern thought's attempts to legitimate grounds in a foundational anthropology. Kant's question, What is Man?, set in play a modern mode of thinking which made possible the idea of man as both origin and object of knowledge, an "empirico-transcendental doublet." The radical turn to the transcendental subject - Kant's 'Copernican' turn - oriented "man" as structuring the conditions for the possibility of knowledge, rather than being structured by them. Foucault holds that Kant's distinction between transcendental and empirical became confused by being subsumed under the question 'What is Man?' "[T]he threshold of our modernity is situated not by the attempt to apply objective methods to the study of man, but rather by the constitution of an empirico-transcendental doublet which was called *man*."[50]

The 'transcendental doublet' is a persistent self-subverting configuration in modern discourse. Foucault claims it is irresolvable and irreducible within the parameters it assumes for its assuagement. The doublet is a conceptual, anthropomorphic configuration whose role as governing *subject* of action and inquiry is perpetually fraught by the ethical necessity to clarify opaque elements in perception and

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49. Ian Hacking, "Self-Improvement", *Foucault: A Critical Reader* ed. David Couzens Hoy (London: Blackwell, 1986) p. 238

50. OT p. 319

judgement by instantiating itself as the *object* of inquiry.[51] A "shadow" is cast over the subject ("man") and irresolvably frustrates claims to transparency, freedom and autonomy.

> "Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration in the *episteme* without thought at the same time discovering, both in itself and outside itself, at its borders yet also in its very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparently inert density in which it is embedded, an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught. The unthought...is not lodged in man like a shrivelled up nature or a stratified history; it is...the Other."[52]

Foucault's critique is two-fold. First, as the foundational source for epistemic conditions of possibility, the modern idea of constitutive *anthropos* is caught in an endless cycle of justifying the search for finite grounds in the idea of man itself. Foucault outlines two forms of analysis between which the modern effort to secure legitimate foundations is torn. The first operates in the domain of man's empirical body - sense perception, motor mechanisms, etc. These act as Kant's 'transcendental aesthetic' and lead to the 'discovery' of determinate conditions to the nature of human knowledge. The second mode of analysis is that of the 'transcendental dialectic.' It studies the history of human knowledge formations, and attempts to show that 'knowledge had historical, social or economic conditions' - "that there was a history of human knowledge which could both be given to empirical knowledge and prescribe its forms."[53] Foucault argued that while these two domains of analysis constructed themselves as completely separate and independent of one another, as the contents of their respective reflection served as transcendental justification, they nevertheless each presuppose a notion of critique which attempts to preserve discursive truth (both historical and empirical) in 'actual experience.' The appeal to 'actual' experience, however, merely replicates the attempt to make the empirical stand for the transcendental.[54] Truth and its desire for complete description through the turn to knowing man as condition for the possibility of autonomy polarizes critique between

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51. William E. Connolly, "Nothing is Fundamental" *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995)p. 11. He says it better than I can.

52. OT., p.326

53. ibid.

54. ibid., p. 321

eschatology (as the objective truth proceeding from man's discourse) and positivism (as the truth of discourse defined on the basis of the truth of the object).[55]

Foucault's second criticism borrows heavily from Heidegger. The modern concern for Truth is a mode of enframing that instantiates judgments of truth and falsity within a specific framework. However, all historical configurations, by the very act of en-framing, exclude from their realms of conceptual and practical possibility. That is, there is always something which exists outside any frame as the "un-thought", the "un-truth", or "the Other." To bring these 'others' within the frame of analysis challenges the conditions for the possibility of the framework. Thinking the conditions of the framework in which it would be possible to open analysis is to critically question these frames, and thus open a 'way' or means of transfiguring the limits which present the other as radically 'unthought.' For Foucault, as for Heidegger, seeking to engage "untruth" concerns questioning the historical frameworks in terms of the 'historical conditions for their possibility.' Truth then is not a matter of conceiving the limits beyond which we cannot go. Truth is a matter of telling, speaking or questioning the historical conditions which present themselves to thought, and thus of being open to the 'untruth' or that which exists outside. Truth-telling (*parrhessia*) is the critical re-figuring of the 'unthought' as a future horizon. There will always be an outside to thought, but critique can, through an historical attention to its own discursive limits, labour "...to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom."

Foucault controversially concludes that as 'man' is an invention of modern thought, and moreover, one which is perhaps nearing its end, the methodological question which presages its ethical limits is able to be transfigured and perhaps exercised differently.

> As things become increasingly reflexive, seeking the principle of their intelligibility only in their own development...man enters in his turn, and for the first time, the field of Western knowledge. Strangely enough, man - the study of whom is supposed by the naive to be the oldest investigation since Socrates - is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things, or in any case, a configuration whose outlines are determined by the new position he has so recently taken up in the field of knowledge. Whence all the chimeras of the new humanisms, all the facile solutions of an 'anthropology' understood as a universal reflection on man, half-empirical, half-philosophical. It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only

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55. ibid., p. 320

> a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form.[56]

Part of Foucault's task in subjecting anthropology's 'rancorous will to knowledge' to historical analysis is to awaken thought from its "anthropological sleep." (Let's not let Foucault's irony in intimating Kant's famous testimonial to Hume escape us.)

> In order to awaken thought from such a sleep - so deep that thought experiences it paradoxically as vigilance, so wholly does it confuse the circularity of a dogmatism folded over upon itself in order to find a basis for itself within itself with the agility and anxiety of a radically philosophical thought - in order to recall it to the possibilities of its earliest dawning, there is no other way than to destroy the anthropological 'quadrilateral' [Kant's four questions for thought] in its very foundations.[57]

Modernity's Enlightenment dogma is the 'will to knowledge' as an obescience before the regulative ideals of truth. For Foucault, this zeal for transparency energizes the endless reduction of subjects as 'natural' selves and normalizes descriptive technologies as affirmative grounds for universal action. We shall see how his critique situates itself with respect to 'awakening' thought to radical transfiguration shortly. Let us first examine how Enlightenment's anthropological sleep developed as a pursuit of self-consciousness.

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IV. Post-Kantian Replications and Possibilities

Foucault maintains that since Kant's inauguration of the modern anthropological project philosophy has attempted to address the question of critique along two primary axes. In "The Art of Telling the Truth" Foucault writes:

> Kant seems to me to have founded the two great critical traditions between which modern philosophy is divided. Let us say that in his great critical work Kant laid the foundations for that tradition of philosophy that poses the question of the conditions in which true knowledge is possible and, on that basis, it may be said that a whole stretch of modern philosophy from the nineteenth century has been presented, developed as the analytics of truth.
>
> But there is also in modern and contemporary philosophy another type of question, another kind of critical interrogation: it is the one we see emerging precisely in the question of the *Aufklärung* or in the text on the Revolution. That other critical tradition poses the question: What is our present? What is the present field of possible experiences? This is not an analytics of truth; it will concern what might be called an ontology of the present, an ontology of ourselves, and it seems to me that the philosophical choice confronting us today is this: one may opt for a

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56. *The Order of Things* p. xxiii

57. OT., p. 341-2

> critical philosophy that will present itself as an analytic philosophy of truth in general, or one may opt for a critical thought that will take the form of an ontology of ourselves, an ontology of the present; it is this form of philosophy that, from Hegel, through Nietzsche and Max Weber, to the Frankfurt School, has founded a form of reflection in which I have tried to work.[58]

The two modes of philosophical address correspond rather closely to the poles between which the tension of modernity persists. On the one hand, what Foucault calls, an "analytics of truth" attempts to detail the *nature* of human knowledge. That is, it privileges descriptions of the empirico-epistemic sort with an eye to eventually consummating freedom in a future of true natural description. The other axis along which post-Kantian philosophy has developed is one which gives primacy to the effects of history on the contextualization of subjectivity and rationality. We might be safe in characterizing this alternate trajectory as a hermeneutical project. Though conscious of historical embeddedness, the latter attempts to 'close the gaps' between "man and his doubles" and thereby define specific registers of debate whose plausibility and excellence resides "in our being able to articulate the background of our lives perspicuously ."[59]

For Foucault, though conceptually closer to the second form of analysis than the first, neither tradition has adequately problematized through reflexive critique the discursive frameworks of methodological and epistemic legitimacy Kant saw as necessary in answering critically the anthropological question; because each takes as a pre-supposition the course of potentially furthering a modern project of conceptual clarity and rationalization. The above quotation by Taylor began by saying as much - "if we concentrate merely on the gain for reason in coming to understand what is illusory in the modern epistemological project and in articulating the insights about us that flow from this, then the claim to have taken the modern project of reason a little farther, and to have understood our forbears a little better than they understood themselves, isn't so unbelievable." Refining the scope of the rational within an anthropological framework of subjective ("man") truths affirms the thesis of a historical progression of rationalization. The result is that our present continues to replicate the aporias and paradoxes of the modern

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58. AT., p. 95.

59. see for instance, Charles Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology" *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* Baynes, Bohman, McCarthy eds., (Cambridge, Mass.,: MIT Press, 1987) p. 481

as either reduction or promise. Hegel, Weber and Habermas's early work is certainly concerned with historical ontologies of the present, yet it is problematic as to whether or not they have given up on a project of self-constitution as legitimation to the extent that Foucault deems is necessary in absolving modernity of its anthropological and prescriptive rationality. Focusing on the interplay of specific rationalities and the practices these configurations inculcate rather than on an essential, though ungraspable, progress of rationalization, Foucault's "nominalism" commits him, much in the way it does Nietzsche, to the "dissipation of history as a grand narrative."[60] Part of the constitutive debate of the past twenty years has been whether or not to accept the tenets of Enlightenment as a modern project of delimitation. Having to choose between either being for the modern project, and therefore rational, or disrupting the modern as a viable means of adjudicating the possibilities of any life-world, and therefore being labelled irrational, smacks Foucault as a form of "blackmail." Foucault complexifies the relationships between modernity, critique, rationality and freedom to the extent that a "choice" between two options negates the responsibility necessary to the historical complexities and contiguities of our past and present. What is needed is complexification, not simplification, when it comes to diagnosing the present dangers of humanism.

> [J]ust as we must free ourselves from the intellectual blackmail of "being for or against the Enlightenment", we must escape from the historical and moral confusionism that mixes the theme of humanism and *the question of Enlightenment* [self-constitution with an eye to freedom]. An analysis of their complex relations in the course of the last two centuries would be a worthwhile project, an important one if we are to bring some measure of clarity to the consciousness that we have of ourselves and the past.[61]

For Foucault, the modern has reduced, described and prescribed limits in terms of which individuals 'recognize' truths of the subject-as-self, and so structured their actions and conscience - the way they think of themselves. Yet, and this is where a transfiguration may start, it also participates in an attitude of 'saying, thinking, and doing' which resists limits, which speaks against specific limits, and attempts to transform them. Foucault claims that, for Kant, Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) was the practiced recognition of one's critical capacity for resistance in an effort of self-constitution, independence and maturity.

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60. NGH., p. 162

61. WE., p. 45 - emphasis added

> ...since Kant, the role of philosophy is to prevent reason from going beyond the limits of what is given in experience; but from the same moment - that is, since the development of the modern state and the political management of society - the role of philosophy is also to keep watch over the excessive powers of political rationality. Which is a rather high expectation.[62]

Kant's thesis of Enlightenment as self-constitution operates with the premise that thought is the exercise of freedom. Foucault reads within the Enlightenment a modern attitude of questioning limits that participates in the ethic of thought as the exercise of freedom. Yet, the further rationalist will to knowledge (savoir) 'affirms only an empty dream of freedom' predicated on the transcendental "search for formal structures with universal value." Both axes of post-Kantian philosophical analysis maintain an allegiance to the liberatory avails of reason, and strive thereby to provide a perspicuous framework for reflection. So constructed, each necessarily assumes the autochthonous status of the subject or agent representationally constrained by a knowable object, and is unable - more likely unwilling - to question what Foucault sees as the defining characteristic of our late-modern times: the epistemic attitude which defines thought as a configuration for delineation, rather than as an ethical openness or question for possibility and practice.[63]

Let us turn to a brief consideration as to how these traditions have arisen.

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While purporting to overcome the tensions between the empirical and the transcendental, Kant's critical philosophy was seen as inextricably bound by the discursive conditions which generated this polarization. We can map the identification of the above noted critical traditions (positivism and

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62. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power", in Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) p. 210

63. "It is probably impossible to give empirical contents transcendental value, or to displace them in the direction of a constituent subjectivity, without giving rise, at least silently to an anthropology - that is to a mode of thought in which the rightful limitations of acquired knowledge (and consequently of all empirical knowledge) are at the same time the concrete forms of existence, precisely as they are given in that same empirical knowledge.

The most distant consequences - and the most difficult ones for us to evade - of the fundamental event that occurred in the Western *episteme* towards the end of the enlightenment century may be summed up as follows: negatively, the domain of the pure forms of knowledge becomes isolated, attaining both autonomy and sovereignty in relation to all empirical knowledge, causing the endless birth and re-birth of a project to formalize the concrete and to constitute, in spite of everything, pure sciences; positively, the empirical domains become linked with reflections on subjectivity, the human being, and finitude, assuming the value and function of philosophy, as well as of the reduction of philosophy or counter-philosophy."- OT p. 248-9

historicity) on to the attempted resolution, by post-Kantian critique, of two central antinomies seen to arise within Kant's modern architechtonic. Part of Foucault's work in re-thinking critique is the attempt to show how subsequent efforts to overcome Kant's antinomies (he mentions Hegel, Dilthey and Habermas)[64] simply reproduce the dualist anthropological framework within which the antinomies arise.

Two antinomies reveal Kant's boundedness. The first of these antinomies let us call the "problem of critical justification." It is the problem of the 'critique of critique', or meta-critique. Put as a question, it might be something like this: Can the project of critique be justified in assuming an *apriori* legitimacy? The second antinomy concerns the idea of a history of reason and has been called Kant's "historical antinomy."[65] As a question, it might be stated: to what extent does Kant have to assume a history to the apriori in order to argue for the summum bonum as he does? These two antinomies reflect the two poles Foucault describes modernity to be torn between - the truth of man as reduction (positivism) and the truth of man as historical promise (eschatology). Let us turn briefly to the problem of 'meta-critique.'

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant explains the importance for reason to be reflexive with respect to itself as follows:

> Reason must in all its undertakings subject itself to criticism; should it limit freedom of criticism by any prohibitions, it must harm itself, drawing upon itself a damaging suspicion. Nothing is so important through its usefulness, nothing so sacred, that it may be exempted from this searching examination, which knows no respect for persons. Reason depends on this freedom for its very existence. For reason has no dictatorial authority; its verdict is always simply the agreement of free citizens, of whom each one must be permitted to express, without let or hindrance, his objections or his veto. (A 738-739, B 766-767)

Kant's 'tribunal of critique', the court before which reason must examine itself, is the final arbiter and essential form of questioning. The problem of meta-critique arises as follows: if reason depends on questioning for its possibility, that is, reason must be reflexive with respect to its modes and forms - the "tribunal of critique" - how may we judge the critical tribunal itself without using reason? In other words, what is critique if it is that which makes reason subject to a 'searching examination'? It seems Kant is

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64. WC., p. 393

65. Yirimiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) p. 21

caught in a viciously circular problem of self-justification. Critique can question the authority of reason, but how is it capable of radically questioning the legitimacy of its own juridical character?[66] Garbis Kortian puts the problem this way - "The critique of knowledge is limited by the fact that there is always something it does not criticize. It does not criticize *itself*, in other words, its initial conception of what knowledge is."[67] Habermas explains that the question of meta-critique was not a problem for Kant. From Descartes through Kant, the project of critique only could claim an *apriori* legitimacy "because the only thing standing at the beginning of critique is the project of unconditional doubt. This doubt required no justification because it legitimated itself as an aspect of reason."[68] Habermas makes it his own project to rethink the Kantian transcendental project by providing a situated historically reflexive ground of intersubjective rather than individualistic rationality.

While critique's genesis is clearly problematic, Kant also posited an end or final purpose to reason. For Kant, the moral law, as reason's formal condition, obligates an *apriori*, final purpose in the form of the highest good in the world. Kant called this historical imperative his *summum bonum*. This leads us to the second antinomy.

In "What is Enlightenment?", Kant delineates the problem for man as that of being obligated to a process of self-constitution whose development promises eventual fulfilment. Foucault describes this eschatological axis of modernity as - "a history to human knowledge which could both be given to empirical knowledge, and prescribe its forms, a history promising 'objective truth proceeding from man's discourse.'"[69] Kant saw "man...as good, not in terms of his essential nature, but in perspective of his destiny; ...history can be seen as the education of the human race."[70] Consequently, a basic feature of reason, for Kant, was the teleological activity of pursuing man's own 'essential ends' or immanent tasks.

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66. Andrew Cutrofello, *Discipline and Critique: Kant, Post-Structuralism and the Problem of Resistance* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994) p. 7

67. Garbis Kortian, *Meta-Critique: The Philosophical Argument of Jürgen Habermas*, trans. John Raffan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980) p. 28-9

68. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest*, trans. J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) p. 13

69. *The Order of Things*, p. 319 - 321

70. F.P. van de Pitte, *Kant as Philosophical Anthropologist* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1971) p. 27

Because man's reason is finite, it does not "immediately possess the full though limited scope that it can achieve in principle, but it must be actualized in a progressive move to self-explication; and thus, human reason is subject to a history or becoming of its own."[71] The problem with Kant constructing reason as teleological, Yovel claims, is that his system both requires and refuses the idea of a history to reason. Time for Kant, was a form of intuition which applies only to the world of experience outside time. But, if reason gains its authority from a claim to complete history as a moral destiny, and, if time is an ahistorical category of apperception posited by consciousness, then Kant is certainly embroiled in a performative contradiction.[72] Note that this formal antinomy of Kant's reproduces the same polarized tensions Foucault describes as besetting modernity - natural knowledge implicated in, and colliding with, a promissory end. The latter antinomy differs from the former in that it cannot be overcome in an appeal to a transcendental postulate. Hegel recognized this formal impasse and "radicalized the approach of the critique of knowledge by subjecting its presuppositions to self-criticism. In doing so he destroy[ed] the secure foundation of transcendental consciousness, from which the apriori demarcation between transcendental and empirical determinations, between genesis and validity, seemed certain."[73]

The philosophies of Hegel and Habermas constitute two central post-Kantian responses to the problematic task Kant's question of Enlightenment as rational self-constitution presaged for modern thought. I have chosen to briefly refer to them, as Foucault understands their critical interrogations to address a tradition Kant inaugurated, namely that of an "ontology of the present." Given the historical reflexivity Hegel and Habermas instantiate in their work, the modern project of legitimate delimitation still remains, however, central to their critical perspectives, though in differing manifestations. Let me turn, too briefly, to possible Foucauldian problems with an Hegelian response to the problem of maturity. Similar critical limitations in the thought of Habermas will be suggested, but will be detailed in a more critically sustained manner in Part III.

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71. Yovel., p. 14

72. ibid., p.21

73. Habermas, p. 13

Hegelian phenomenology traces the historical processes by which structures of consciousness are generated. Hegel dialectically tied Kant's apriori and transcendental conditions to the grand historical narrative of Reason as Spirit, and thereby concretized experience as so many manifestations of historical consciousness. For Foucault, Hegel's critique, though attentive to the 'historical ontologies of the present,' did not go far enough for two reasons. First, he did not question the historical character of consciousness in the presupposition of the Fichtean dialectic of the subject/object dualism. For Hegel, this dualism would be overcome at the end of history, but it was a rational pre-supposition for thought's consciousness of itself as a concrete dialectic. For Foucault, the assumption of the subject/object dichotomy simply replicates the anthropological "quadrilateral" without radically addressing the "unthought" that the subject's positing of itself as object for thought excludes, yet is haunted by, as "man's double."

Foucault's objection, though not specifically referencing Heidegger, is most certainly one that follows from Heidegger's like-minded objection to Hegel's fundamental dualism. Hegel's critical system may be said to account for such a criticism in its appeal to the teleological movement of history, but of course such a transcendental appeal is explicitly rejected by Foucault. This leads us to the second problem. Hegel situates maturity as a teleological outcome of modernity's reconciling reason with itself; "a redemption of its promise with itself and the realization of its authentic nature."[74] What was historically situated as incomplete was reconciled in a future of rational necessity and perfectibility. The aim is still an idealized rational transparency of consciousness for thought. Foucault was adamantly against any form of idealized critique which attempted to crystallize the pursuit of self-consciousness in terms of a counterfactual future in which all the impulses that govern the self and the polis would be transparent to its participants.

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We have seen that two problems arise out of Kant's bequeathing to modern philosophy directions for critical thought; first that of legitimacy, and second that of history and progress. We have also seen that, for Foucault, critical modernity is constelled, amongst a variety of oppositions, through a dialectic of two constitutive activities; that of attempting to delineate the parameters of knowledge in a production of

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74. Owen, p. 3

true discourse; but, in so far as are produced mechanisms of discursive appropriation, critique carries *within it* the permanent practice of questioning and opposing that which is given or accepted, and, in the modern, more often than not legislated.

The obverse mediation of the relationship between maturity and modernity is instantiated in the consonant enlightenment form of the question which, though reflected in a context of Kantian emergence, nevertheless reveals that the modern will to truth need be conscious of itself as a problem. This practice or ethical exercise begins as critical resistance and transfigures limits by "attempting to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult."[75] Understandably, we find these two discursive tensions - delineation and transgression - forming much of the current debate surrounding modernity and the possibility of maturity.[76] It is the intersection, or what Foucault calls the "chiasm", of these two modern traits that has characterized the problem of *Aufklärung* up until the middle of this century.

> In the *Aufklärung*...one tried to decipher, to recognize the most prominent line of ascent of Western reason, while it was the politics to which it was tied that became the object of distrustful examination. Such is, ...roughly, the chiasm that characterizes the way in which the problem of *Aufklärung* was posed during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century... ."[77]

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V. Foucault's Re-Thinking of Critique

Contemporary philosophy is, consequently, of two minds about critique, both corresponding to the two poles constitutive of the dialectic between transcendence and transfiguration. The attempt to legislate a valid critical philosophy in a theory of rationality and objectively legitimate reflexivity (Hegel, Mill, Freud, Habermas, Rawls) contests a more radically historical tradition (Nietzsche, Weber, the early Frankfurt

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75. M. Foucault, "Practicing Criticism" trans., A. Sheridan, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* ed. L. Kriztman (New York: Routledge, 1988) p. 155

76. I have framed this debate between that of Habermas and Foucault. It is the most focused and explicit formulation reflected in the literature - see for ex. *Critique and Power: Re-Casting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994). One may also find other discussions taking correlative sides and reflecting similar themes. For instance - Benhabib and Fraser/Butler and Cornell in *Feminist Contentions* (New York: Routledge, 1995), and Taylor/Connolly in *Political Theory Vol 13* .

77. WC., p. 389

School, Adorno, Foucault), the latter of which problematizes the epistemic possibility and universal applicability of practices and procedures methodologically entailed by justifications of 'validity' and 'rationality.' This latter historical tradition sees "philosophy as the problematization of the present,...the questioning by the philosopher of this present to which he belongs and in relation to which he has to situate himself. [It is] philosophy as the discourse of modernity on modernity."[78] Critique for these thinkers takes as its task an attention to the historical ontology of the present.

> ...one may opt for a critical thought that will take the form of an ontology of ourselves, an ontology of the present; it is in this form of philosophy that, from Hegel, through Nietzsche and Max Weber, to the Frankfurt School, has founded a form of reflection in which I have tried to work.[79]

The tradition with which Foucault aligned himself emphasized examining the various modes and practices (*dispositifs*) within history which effect specific constructions of truth and subjectivity. Methodologically, these thinkers read history as certain fabrications of contextual embeddedness. Foucault takes from these thinkers an historical attention and, under the aegis of disrupting universality to probe specific rationalities (practices) constitutive of the political technology of the present, examines these historical practices with an eye, not to interior experience, or fundamental structures of scientific knowledge, or to a progression of inarticulate "facts"[80], but towards specific articulations of nomadic mechanisms of rationality and the modes of subjugation tied to them.[81]

Contemporary attempts at continuing the Enlightenment dream of complete rationality, justice, and transparency in social relations, proposed most self-consciously by Jürgen Habermas, further a prescriptive, epistemic critical theory of the legislative sort. Habermas' efforts to theorize critique as a

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78. AT. p. 88

79. AT p. 95

82. "...the unthought is not lodged in man like a shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other." OT. p. 326

81. WC., p.391. There are, of course, distinctions to be made between thinkers as diverse as Hegel, Weber and Foucault. But, if Foucault is correct, at least generally, in his characterization of a post-Kantian tradition which emphasizes critique's ties to an historical methodology, his work is certainly closer to Hegel's contextual historicity of subjective construction than it is to a more scientifically reductive paradigm.

rational moment of collective (inter-subjective) self-reflection is an attempt to ground epistemic validity in the results of universally rational, and therefore legitimate critical *procedures*. Habermasian politics are oriented to grounding a legislative determination of the order of meaning. Hence his claims to provide a "cognitive foundation" to his critical theory and discourse ethics.[82] As such, Habermas' transcendental model furthers an Enlightenment form of Utopian onto-politics in a legislative formalism.

Important for the present analysis is that contemporaneously, both the Habermasian transcendental perspective and the Foucauldian agonal perspective take Kant as a primary source for reading 'critique' into philosophical practice. Habermas emphasizes the legislative validity of critique as legitimate reason-giving. Foucault emphasizes a politico-ethical 'attitude' of critique underlying or motivating the oppositional discourse of modernity - "...a philosophic ethos that could best be described as a permanent critique of our historical era."[83] Yet, while each takes Kant's critical philosophy as a modern source, both the critical theory of Foucault and the critical theory of Habermas emphasize very different facets of *a shared critical attitude*. Foucault claims that this 'attitude of modernity' exists as an ethic of relating to reality, a mode of thinking and acting that "marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task."[84] Foucault assigns this formative attitude to Kant's critical philosophy. He writes:

> The Kantian critique...marks the threshold of modernity; it questions representation, not in accordance with the endless movement that proceeds from the simple element to all its possible combinations, but on the basis of its rightful limits. Thus it sanctions for the first time...the withdrawal of knowledge and thought outside the space of representation....The unlimited field of representation now appears as a metaphysics. But as a metaphysics that had never stepped outside itself, that had posited itself in an uninformed dogmatism, and that never brought out into light the question of its right. It opens at the same time the possibility of another metaphysics; *one whose purpose will be to question, apart from representation, all that is the source and origin of representation.*[85]

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82. see J. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, trans T. McCarthy, vol. 1 (Beacon Press: Boston, 1981)pp. 61-70 and "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification" in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) pp. 43 - 115

83. WE., p. 42.

84. WE., p. 39

85. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1970) p. 242-43; emphasis added

Foucault reads Kantian critique in a political effort[86], emphasizing not only the impossibility of apodeictic legislative validity in theories of rationality, but also the political and historical contingencies which contribute to the fluid heterogenous construction of notions like validity, legitimacy, and rationality. Foucault's re-construction of reason's multiple "rationalities" emphasizes an uncertain and nomadic quality to thought, and claims poetic dissolution of the possibility of a determinate semantic order. In his attention to critique as an ontology of the present, Foucault transfigures the tradition which takes Kant as *only* offering a moment of self-reflection based on a theory of rationality. As such, his work traces a path of thinking which exemplifies, as Nietzsche did, an aestheticized ethics of critique derived from a philosophy of historical agonism.

Kant is read, by Foucault, even in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as an essentially political thinker whose starting point reveals an anti-foundationalist and constructivist ethos. Recall Kant's claims in *Critique of Pure Reason* (A: 738-9, B:766-7). Critique involves the persistent processes of reflexivity as an openness to questioning. Kant's project therein was to subject Reason to critique and self-reflectively establish a foundation for the possibility of knowledge. Reason depends for its existence on the freedom of critique's openness to questioning. Moreover, critique is the instantiation of a communal self-constitution in terms of whose freedom the condition of enlightenment depends - "Reason must in all its undertakings subject itself to criticism; should it limit freedom of criticism...it must harm itself,... . Reason depends on this freedom for its very existence. For Reason has no dictatorial authority,..." (A 738-9, B 766-7). That Kant went further and tried to define the limits of a public reason does not negate the radical openness from which critique emerges as a discursive practice aware of the fact that it remains always tied to its constitutive moments, to its present and the historical limits of that present. We have seen that *Aufklärung*, for Kant, was a historico-philosophical concept, and a task of public self-constitution whose

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86. "Political" could mean two things in this context. It could mean a theoretical instantiation of prescriptive, normative limits or grounds for moral action. Or, it could mean a contextualized, problematizing challenge to concepts and metaphysical assumptions of autonomous subjectivity found in Cartesian, Lockean, and Kantian prescriptive systems. I take Foucault to be political in the latter sense. In other words, he acknowledges subjectivity as a public rather than strictly private prerogative.

aim was to work "bit by bit out of barbarity."[87] It was history's universal purpose that this be the case. What a Foucauldian analysis of the Enlightenment epistemic anthropology suggests is that in any enframing, the "unthought" which is excluded remains radically 'other' to critical possibility, therefore neglecting critique's ethical openness upon whose pre-supposition any delimitation depends. Foucault recognizes that Kant's concept of enlightenment is launched from this deeper level of critical openness to historico-philosophical reflection, but that the attitude of permanent re-activation became tied to a humanist discourse claiming to "give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge of what may constitute our historical limits."[88]

In "What is Critique?", Foucault describes the post-Kantian predilection to analytically address the problems of legitimacy as stemming precisely from the discrepancy between Kant's own competing conceptions of critique; between on the one hand, the primacy of the interrogative and ethical instantiation of critique in the interhuman relationships as those that give any meaning to a metaphysics, and, on the other hand, the subjective, cognitivist critique as the epistemic legitimation of necessary boundaries to human thinking. Foucault uses the word *décalage* to describe the gap introduced by Kant's posing the question of *Aufklärung* as a problem for knowledge.[89] The discrepancy between critique as the question of ethics and critique as epistemic legitimacy is one Foucault describes Kant as introducing to much of western philosophy.

> [I]t seems to me that this question of *Aufklärung* since Kant, because of Kant, and likely because of the slippage between *Aufklärung* and critique that he introduced, was essentially posed in terms of knowledge, that is to say, in departing from what was the historic destiny of knowledge at the moment of the constitution of modern science; that is also to say, in seeking in this destiny what already marked the undetermined effects of power to which it would necessarily be linked by objectivism, positivism, technology, and so forth, by referring this knowledge to the conditions of constitution and of legitimacy of all possible knowledge, and finally in seeking how the passage

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87. Kant "What is Enlightenment?" p. 62

88. WE., p. 47

89. *Décalage* has been translated in the Schmidt volume (1996) as "slippage." It is more generally understood to describe a conceptual "discrepancy" or "gap." While 'slippage' does seem to convey some of the original meaning, I found more clarity in thinking of *décalage* as 'discrepancy.' The 'discrepancy' between competing, and yet entwined, conceptions of critique and enlightenment Foucault illustrates at work in Kant may cast some light on Kant's own hesitations after the third *Critique* to declare the critical project a success.

> outside of legitimacy had taken place. In a word, it is the procedure of *analysis* that seems to me at bottom to have been engaged by the slippage of critique in relation to *Aufklärung* effected by Kant. It seems to me that from there , one has a procedure of analysis that is at bottom that which was followed most often, a procedure of analysis one could call an inquiry into the legitimacy of the historical modes of knowing....More simply still: What false idea did knowledge make of itself, and to what excessive use was it found exposed, to what domination consequently was it found tied?[90]

Within Foucault's reading of Kant's 'inaugural' formulation of what the Enlightenment is, we can see the attempt to draw out of Enlightenment the permanent possibility of questioning both the origins and what subsequently comes of Enlightenment. He discards from Kant's original perception of meaning in the historical present the valorization of delineative judgement as definitive of true maturity and freedom. Conversely, he retains Kant's perception of critique's openness to the form of the question; that there must be a reflexivity within thought which engages the contingent and the ambiguous of our present and in ourselves as subjects.[91]

Kant's political ethos exists as 'imprimatur prolegomenon' to critical philosophy's future speculations surrounding the conditions of possible knowledge.[92] Foucault argues that, even for Kant, critique as the question of ethics precedes the court of Reason. The sign of the Revolution as a 'disposition

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90. WC., p. 393

91. see Colin Gordon, "Question, Ethos and Event" *Economy and Society* Vol.15, No. 1 February 1986 p. 74 - 75. Foucault's ambiguous engagement with Enlightenment critique is consistently distorted by the lens of the 'postmodern' label, as though a post-modern critique entailed wiping the slate clean. Nothing could be further from the truth - ie. further than from what the work presents to the reader. Much of the interpretive and critical literature misses out on the fundamental engagement Foucault's work has with modernity. But it is a complexification. Again we must remember his eschewal of 'either/or' blackmail. His philosophical honesty wakes us up to the complexities ignored by the moral "need" to minimize contingency and maximize answerability.

92. Foucault is not alone, nor is he unique, in reading Kant's critical philosophy as essentially political. The following authors have each argued convincingly that Kant's political thinking is in no way an addendum to his 'Copernican turn' - see: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958); Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), and *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Reference, 1995); Willi Goetschel, *Constituting Critique: Kant's Writing as Critical Praxis*, trans. Eric Schwab (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 1 - 15, and 144 - 166; Kimberley Hutchings, *Kant,Critique and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Onora O'Neill,*Constructions of Reason: Explorations in Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 3-77.

which operates in history and the progress of mankind' was, for Kant, an example of a permanent re-activation of an ethical attitude to an historical ontology in which judgement occupies the central place.

> The question of the *Aufklärung*, or of reason, as a historical problem has in a more or less occult way traversed the whole of philosophical thinking from Kant to our own day. The other face of the present that Kant encountered is the Revolution; the Revolution as at once event, rupture, and overthrow of history, as failure, but at the same time as value, as a sign of the disposition that is operating in history and in the progress of humankind. There again the question for philosophy is not to determine what part of the Revolution should be preserved by way of a model. It is to know what is to be done with the will to revolution, that "enthusiasm" for the revolution, which is quite different form the revolutionary enterprise itself.[93]

The 'will to revolution' is the critical interrogative moment of ethical self-constitution. For Foucault, the question and experience (danger) of critique, as uncertainty and ambiguity, foregrounds the moment of transformation suitable to ethical responsibility. Ethical responsibility, for him, is the exercise of self-constitution, for it can only be honestly conscious of its own openness in a truthful attention to the Other or the "unthought."[94]

There is quite a specific correlation between Foucault's meaning of critique and Kant's meaning *Aufklärung*. While both interpret thought as the work of freedom on 'our limits', Kant strove to make that freedom correspond with a rational articulation of human limits. For Kant, the unified subject is a privileged locus for philosophical meaning. As a bearer of rights, interests and freedoms, the subject is an epistemic centre to be protected from injustice and domination. For Foucault, such an account of

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93. AT., p. 95

94. It is interesting to note that Levinas recognizes a similar ambiguity or discrepancy at work in the Kantian work of critique. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas attempts to establish the "primacy of the ethical, of the relationship of man to man,...a primacy of an irreducible structure upon which all others rest." He notes that "the role Kant attributed to sensible experience in the domain of the understanding belongs in metaphysics to interhuman relationships. It is from moral relationships that every metaphysical affirmation takes on a 'spiritual' meaning,... ." See *Totality and Infinity* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Duquesne University Press: Pittsburgh, 1969) p. 79 It is a moot point, I believe, what, for Kant, constitutes "humanity's progress." Is it to be decided at the court of Reason, or at the court of Critique? There is evidence Kant held the latter. See A738-9 in CPR. Foucault and Levinas attend to the latter as well. The result is that enlightenment or self-creation entails a permanent reactivation of an ethical imperative by reference to an ontology in which the question of ethics occupies a central place.
Though Foucault never mentions, to my knowledge, Levinas in any published work or interviews, an interesting study needs to be done on the relationships between the two thinkers. They have to have known of and been influenced by each others writing. It is puzzling that no mention is made by either of each other.

rationality and subjectivity posits constraints that prevent a subject's (and a publics) mature autonomy (freedom); however, it is, as such, conceptually unable to provide an account as to how those discourses and practices constitute subjectivity within their concrete limits. It is unable to account for these pressures because it insists on construing the unified subject as recognized in the universal rational achievement of modernity.[95]

Kant's anthropological attempt to define the nature of man exceeds the limits set out for itself, for he fails to recognize that his own thought regarding the universal structure of apriori concepts is historically conditioned. Foucault's critique attempts to trace the contingent links between how truth and subjectivity are historically manifest. Foucault takes from Kant the enlightenment task of self-constitution, and re-thinks the question of critique "as a matter of making one's own history, of fabrication as through fiction the history that would be traversed by the question of the relations between the structures of rationality that articulate the true discourse and the mechanisms of subjugation that are tied to it."[96]

Foucault generates a far more ambiguous, yet perhaps more philosophically honest, exercise whose "practical coherence [resides] in the care brought to the process of putting historico-critical reflection to the test of concrete practices."[97] Foucault's critique is less interested in discovering vantage points or positions universally applicable, than in critique's political engagement and ethical tasks of self-constitution. The significance, for Foucault, of Kant's essay on Enlightenment is not the emphasis on 'applied forms of procedural rationality as universally legitimate', but on the problem of self-constitution as an attitude to thought. "What Kant describes as *Aufklärung* is indeed what I...describe as critique, as that critical attitude one sees appear as a specific attitude in the West from...what was historically the great process of governmentalization of society,...the art of not being governed so much."[98]

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95. see William E. Connolly, "Discipline, Politics and Ambiguity", Chapter 7 in *Politics and Ambiguity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) p. 103

96. WC., p. 391

97. WE., p. 50

98. WC., pp. 386-7

The significance of Kant's essay on *Aufklärung* and its reflection on the present as a difference in history is that it motivates a particular task and attitude to modern thinking - "It is in reflection on 'today' as difference in history and as motive for a particular philosophical task that the novelty of this appears to me to lie...[I]t seems...we may recognize a point of departure: the outline of what we might call the attitude of modernity."[99] Foucault's own critical task became that of teasing out an understanding of this attitude; and thereafter, implicating the attitude, as philosophic ethos, in a mode of relating to contemporary reality - as an exercise "that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task."[100]

Foucault envisions a different procedure for critique, one which preserves the openness of the question of critique. To this alternate process he gives the unwieldy term, *événementialisation*.[101] The primary responsibility of this process is to approach the problem of self-constitution (*Aufklärung*) not as a problem for knowledge, but as a a problem of power. The problem thus is of exploring (problematizing, questioning) the relationships between constellations of knowledge, practices and mechanisms of coping. Foucault writes:

> What one seeks then is not to know what is true or false, justified or not justified, real or illusory, scientific or ideological, legitimate or abusive. One seeks to know what are the ties, what are the connections that can be marked between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge, what games of dismissal and support are developed from the one to the others, what it is that enables one element of knowledge to take up effects of power assigned in a similar system to a true or probable or uncertain or false element, and what it is that enables some process of coercion to acquire form and the justifications proper to a rational, calculated, technically efficient, and so forth element.[102]

The methodological process of examining such "eventializations" of power is genealogy. We shall examine genealogy in more detail in the next section.

Notice though, Foucault's critical emphasis in approaching *Aufklärung*. Understood as a 'reflection on today as difference', Foucault emphasizes critique's transfiguring attention to "the relationship of power, truth and the subject." In problematizing the traditional picture of Enlightenment as a

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99. ibid.

100. ibid., p. 39

101. WC., p. 393

102. ibid., p. 393

particularly crucial stage on a continuum of rational progression, Foucault attempts to situate critique not as defining "the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done and what may be hoped. [For Kant it was] when the legitimate use of reason has been clearly defined in its principles that its autonomy [ie. maturity] can be assured."[103] Though "critique is in a sense, the handbook of reason that has grown up in Enlightenment, ... conversely the Enlightenment is [also] the age of critique."[104] Foucault wants to emphasize, rather, that through attending to the present as 'difference in history, critique may question and contest limits, and yet resist the temptation to posit transcendental legitimations of rational thought. Thought exists as an exercise of freedom, yet critique can only constitute an historical analysis of those social apparatuses which concretize particular manifestations of truth, agency and knowledge. In "What is Critique?" he states that the primary characteristic of historico-philosophical practice is "to desubjectify the philosophical question by referring to its historical content, to liberate the historical contents questioning the effects of power from [the] truth which they are supposed to restore."[105]

We began by noting that Foucault interprets the modern condition as a specific confluence of Christian techniques of self-decipherment and Enlightenment anthropological technologies of rational legislation. This chiasm or meshing of historical *epistemes* and practices produces specific constructions of subjectivity, truth and ethics. These constructions are ever the more refined and reified by the perpetual modern methodology of transparent self-consciousness. Foucault's critical theory as historico-philosophical critique aims to disrupt this "rancorous will to knowledge" by facilitating, within the ethic modernity pre-supposes - the ethic of the question - an attitude to, and practice of, thinking differently.

Foucault's historico-philosophical critique works on the relationships between truth and subjectivity as they are generated by concrete social apparatuses. His term for these clusters of signification

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103. ibid p. 38

104. ibid

105. WC., p. 392

and practice is *dispositifs*.[106] In an essay on Foucault, Gilles Deleuze defines Foucault's meaning of *dispositif* clearly. A *dispositif* is:

> "...a tangle, a multi-linear ensemble. It is a composed of lines, each having a different nature. And the lines in the *dispositif* do not outline or surround systems which are each homogeneous in their own right, object, subject, language, and so on, but follow directions, trace balances which are always off balance, now drawing together and then distancing themselves from one another. ... Untangling these lines within a social apparatus is...like drawing up a map, doing cartography, surveying unknown landscapes...[T]his is what [Foucault] calls 'working on the ground.' One has to position oneself on these lines themselves, these lines which do not just make up the social apparatus but run through it, from North to South, from East to West, or diagonally.[107]

Foucault approaches Kant in an engaged cartographic effort; following lines, ruptures and dissonances - the tangle of the *Aufklärung* - to understand how we have come to the present. With the history that we have in hand, Foucault re-thinks critique and transforms the problem of thought in a manner that makes possible the opportunity to think differently, to think otherwise than being, and perhaps, beyond essence.

Foucault is best read as disrupting the legislative turn in favour of a 'counter-modern' critical theory which emphasizes: a) continually calling into question the present; b) the ambiguities and contingencies at the heart of the epistemic impulse; and, c) the ethico-political practice of creative relation to the self - what Foucault will eventually term an 'aesthetics of existence.'

Foucault's 'transfiguration of critique' locates, in the Kantian critical attention to the present (an attention which, as part of constitutive critique, precedes the epistemic turn), a specific attitude which, by dint of its critical oppositional interest, situates the subject's constructed position in a nexus of practical, historical relationships; relationships formed through the "tight fabric" of truth, subjectivity, knowledge, power and ethics. He reveals these complex relational interplays as concealed in the 'will to truth's' epistemic mask of universality, objectivity and moral codes.[108] This historico-philosophic work, Foucault

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106. It has been numerously noted that *dispositif* does not have a suitable equivalent in English. Some translators use 'apparatus' - see Timothy Armstrong's translation of Gilles Deleuze's essay "What is a *dispositif*?", in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher* (New York: Routledge 1992). I think Adorno's phrase 'constellation' works nicely to express the similar concept of nexuses of social practice constructing thought.

107. G. Deleuze, "What is a *dispositif*?", *Michel Foucault: Philosopher* trans. T.J. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992)p. 159

108. Foucault., "The Order of Discourse" p. 56

argues, is itself of an enlightenment lineage, precisely because it situates itself within the critical question of *Aufklärung*. "If Foucault is indeed perfectly at home in the philosophical tradition, it is within the critical tradition of Kant, and his undertaking could be called 'A Critical History of Thought'"[109*]

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Let me summarize these reflections. For Foucault, Kant's inauguration of Enlightenment is unique ('unique' in the history of systems of thought) in that it simultaneously manifests itself as a problem and an orientation for solution. *Aufklärung* exists as both constitutive task and predicament. Importantly, Kant's essay sits "at the crossroads of critical reflection and reflection on history." It constitutes "as a point of departure: the outline of what we might call the attitude of modernity"[110] - an attitude "at the heart of the historical consciousness the Enlightenment has of itself."[111] Kant's question of *Aufklärung* is defined "in an almost negative way, as an *Ausgang*, an 'exit', a 'way out'....In the text on *Aufklärung*, he deals with the question of contemporary reality alone. He is not seeking to understand the present on the basis of a totality or a future achievement. He is looking for a difference: What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?"[112] Foucault views Kant's 1784 essay as defining a new question and, though intimating towards a universalizable solution, primarily locating a central task for thought. Kant's focus on the present as difference in history attends to the problem of limits as the central question facing the freedom for thought. His invocation of private and public reason instantiates, as an orientation for solution to the problem of maturity, the process of assuming responsibility for, and progressing, critical rationality. Read in connection with Kant's definition of *Aufklärung*, the three *Critiques* are an attempt to provide something of an answer to the process of critical self-reflection.

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109. "Maurice Florence", 'Foucault, Michel, 1926- ', trans. C. Porter in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*., ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 314.
* 'Maurice Florence' was a pseudonym (a mask) used by Foucault in writing his own (!) entry for the *Dictionnaire des philosophes* ed. Denis Huisman (Presses Universitaires de France, 1984)

110. WE., p. 38

111. ibid., p. 44

112. ibid., p. 34

Foucault's reading of Kant *qua Aufklärer* emphasizes an ethos or attitude the question of self-constitution brings to being and thought. Rather than modernity existing as a historically legitimate stage in the progression of reason, Foucault understands enlightenment to characterize a philosophic ethos or attitude to thought which exercises a form of thinking attentive to the historical limits constitutive of an historical present.

> "[A] question... appeared at the end of the eighteenth century. It was to become one of the poles of modern philosophy. This question is very different from what we call the traditional philosophical questions: What is the world?, What is man?, What is truth, What is Knowledge? How can we know something? And so on. The question, I think, which arises at the end of the eighteenth century is: What are we in our actuality? You will find the formulation of this question in a text written by Kant. I think that a new pole has been constituted for the activity of philosophizing, and this pole is characterized by the question, the permanent and ever changing question, "What are we today?" And that is, I think, the field of the historical reflection on ourselves.[113]

By emphasizing an expressed attitude in Kant's essay, Foucault sought to disrupt reading modernity as the process by which are identified universal structures of rationality, and the Enlightenment as a stage along this rational progression. The question for thought Foucault finds at work in Kant's essay is one that:

> "...will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say and do as so many historical events...it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know, but will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do or think."[114].....
>
> Thinking back on Kant's text, I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity as an attitude rather than as a period in history. And by 'attitude' I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end a way of thinking and feeling; a way too of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task."[115]

If Foucault reads enlightenment (self-constitution) as a question for the present, as a task of understanding who we are *today*, then it is important to emphasize that this is not a question only for us, those who live with the profit and shadow of all that the Enlightenment has become. Foucault's emphasis on the question

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113. M. Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals" *Technologies of the Self* Martin, Gutman , Hutton eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 1988)p. 145 - hereafter TS

114. WE., p. 46

115. WE., p. 39

of enlightenment becomes a question for and about thought. It is thus a radical re-orientation of the narrative histories of reason, rationalization, de-mythification, and progress.

> Let us say, if you will, that it is not because one privileges the eighteenth century, because one is interested in it, that one encounters the problem of *Aufklärung*. I would say that it is because one wants to pose fundamentally the problem "What is *Aufklärung* ?" that one encounters the historical scheme of our modernity. It will not be a matter of saying that the fifth-century Greeks are a little like eighteenth-century philosophers or that the twelfth century was already a kind of Renaissance, but rather of trying to see under what conditions, at the price of what modifications or what generalizations, one can apply to *any moment of history* this question of *Aufklärung*, the relationship of power, truth and the subject.[116]

John Rajchman writes that Foucault's concern for the specific and changing 'positivities' of reason envisages the tradition "as an endless plurality in the question of reason in our historical reflection on ourselves."[117] Revealed in Foucault's attitudinal emphasis on the question of enlightenment, is a specific methodological orientation which attempts to devise a kind of critical historical questioning prior to judgement by reference to agreed upon norms. It is an orientation tied to a 'historicity' in which the ethos and attitude engaging the question takes precedence over the responses given to it.[118]

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116. WC., p. 392 - In this passage Foucault's conception is not very different from that of Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; that is, enlightenment is a particular comportment to life and being, as it is also a specific stage in a history of systems of thought.

117. John Rajchman., "Translation Without a Master", *Philosophical Events* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) p. 17

118. ibid.

Part III

A Genealogy of Critique

The genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of origin; somewhat in the manner of the pious philosopher who needs a doctor to exorcise the shadow of his soul.

Foucault ('NGH')

> Critique is the movement by which the subject gives itself the right to question truth on its effects of power, and to question power on its discourses of truth,...in a word, the politics of truth.
>
> M. Foucault

Foucault's questions concerning the problem of 'self-creation' are central to his identification of, and with, a critical attitude at work in the question of enlightenment. His return to Kant's original formulations of what *Aufklärung* is foregrounds an ambiguous, historically concerned, critical ethos pervading enlightenment. At the same time, it contextualizes his own philosophical development of a certain notion of the critical work involved in a practical and political exercise of self-constitution.

Sapere Aude! reflects Kant's political conceptualization of critique as an ethically motivated discipline of resistance. The question of historical actuality and 'present-ness' took on a meaning for Kant that irrevocably tied the task of thinking to the discourses which made up his present.[1] Foucault believes Kant instantiated this form of critique as a discursive practice through an "ontology of the present." We saw in Part II how Foucault's critique of Kant's philosophical anthropology problematized both the valorization of a transcendental science, as well as the figure of autonomous subjectivity, in terms of which a finitistic analytic demands un-ambiguous self-certainty. Foucault was doubtful that detailing the necessary conditions of knowledge would sufficiently ensure freedom. It is a methodology Foucault goes to great lengths to problematize, his concern being that such a methodology produces specific expectations and structures within which freedom (or any other concept or value) comes to bear specific meanings.

Foucault further identified a tension or discrepancy (*décalage*) between Kant's developments of

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1. see M. Foucault, "What Our Present Is" *The Politics of Truth*, Lotringer and Hochroth, eds., (Semiotext(e): New York, 1997) p. 147 - 49. Kant's work does not interpret history in as multiplicitous and contingent a manner as does Foucault's, for Kant conceives history as a far more progressive and linear movement of rationality. For Foucault, thought, knowledge and history were pluralities characterized by difference and dispersion. Never-the-less, the question of history, its influence and its importance for thinking the present, was an attitude to thought Foucault recognizes Kant as being uniquely interested in. No doubt, the question of enlightenment had a meaning, for Kant, that it did not hold for someone like Descartes. The question of Enlightenment Kant answers was precisely that - what is this thing called today, and how is it different from yesterday and tomorrow?

critique as both a problem for liberty and a problem for knowledge. Through the latter's prescription of necessary conditions for possible experience, a former ethical form of critical questioning which opens a path of meaning for transcendental methodology is elided, and an original ambiguity suppressed. As a result of isolating, within Kant, an inaugural philosophical attitude of historical reflexivity, Foucault attempts, therefore, to transfigure the practice of critique as an 'ontology of the present' - a simultaneous historical and critical thinking which directs our attention to the relation between our present and the limits, events, and mechanisms which structure future possibilities.

The identification of a discrepancy or conceptual gap between two of Kant's uses of critique allows Foucault to refigure critique as a political problem. As such, he describes the delineation of subjectivized centres of scientific knowledge in terms of their historical designations and practical, often contingent, generation.[2] Kant's de-lineation of subjective limits is denied by Foucault as portending any necessity. Instead, critique's embedded, interrogative practice is re-thought and placed in the tenuous capacity of experimentation. Foucault critically foregrounds the ethical space questioning demands of thought, one which gains practical legitimacy only in future, creative possibilities.

It is, yet, a devoutly ambiguous future. The result of opening discourse "towards the incessant, interminable listening to, and interpretation of a voice" unmoors those forms of thought which seek to minimize contingency and risk in the global extension of a cognitive discourse that appropriates everything within its framework or *Gestell*.[3] At once uncomfortable and liberating, Foucault's critical task of 'self-creation' requires practitioners of critical thought to work to oppose those models of authority and

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2. By "generation" I mean a "doubling" process: both a forward looking sense of production and making, together with a reflexive examination of descent, tradition, or family resemblance. We could use the term "origin" here, with the proviso that it designate the point at which meaning becomes an object of thought. In other words, "origin" only makes sense in a genealogical context when it is understood *in medias res* rather than *ex nihilo*. In his most concentrated examination of genealogy, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", Foucault distinguishes between Nietzsche's three uses of words describing "origin." *Ursprung* was used to mean a metaphysical foundation or indubitable first truth of reason, an origin which has no precedent. *Herkunft*, in contrast, is used to describe the descendent origins of an idea's emergence. It connotes the multiplicitous fragments which make up a tradition or discursive practice. Foucault translates it as "descent." *Entstehung* is closely co-joined with *Herkunft*. It means "emergence", and is used to describe the generative emergence or production of a tradition from the ever changing plurality which makes up its possibility.

3. Jean-François Lyotard, "Time Today" *Oxford Literary Review* 1989 p. 20

sovereignty which conscript and define subjective parameters of truth, rationality and the good in progressively limited and disciplinary ways. His attitude? "[M]aybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are."[4]

The critical apparatus adequate to this uncomfortable exercise of refusal, Foucault terms, 'genealogy.' By 'genealogy', Foucault designates an historical investigation into the origins and rationalities productive of specific discursive and practical frameworks. Genealogy is the central critico-methodological tool Foucault used in explicating a form of critique that works to transfigure our limits. This section of the essay will inquire into the methods and purposes of genealogy, with respect, primarily, to the ways in which modernity circumscribes autonomy and freedom within *dispositifs* of truth, the subject, and reason. Of course, modernity's constellations produce normative claims. Foucault's critique focuses on how and what sort of normative claims are made, and the manners by which such claims shape ethical and political practices. What follows will briefly examine how genealogy is engaged as a form of critically re-thinking and re-writing our accepted moral narratives and their concomitant practices.

The central criticism of genealogical methodology is the so-called 'problem of legitimacy.' Lyotard, responsive to this concern, poses the problem as follows: "Who is the author of the commandment [to resist totalizing thought]? What is its legitimacy?"[5] Habermas phrases the problem of legitimacy in terms of "crypto-normativism."[6] He claims that Foucault proposes specific ethical choices while lacking the necessary, legitimate criteria by which to advocate the validity of choosing an ethics of refusal. These are serious, though revealing, concerns, and ones that I shall address at the end of this section. I shall return

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4. M. Foucault, "The Subject and Power" in Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) p.216

5. Lyotard, "Time Today" p. 20 It should be noted, of course, that Lyotard, unlike Habermas, does not see the problem of legitimacy as one that needs to be solved. Rather, by addressing the problem as an important one that arises within a modernist context, it might be possible to transfigure current figures of truth, while remaining responsive to the worries a non-epistemic critical ethic raises for the globalized politics of late modernity.

6. J. Habermas, "Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again" *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (MIT Press: Cam., Mass., 1987) p. 282

therein to the discussion of Habermas begun earlier, and so continue Foucauldian questions of an attitude (ethos) to thought adequate to a practice of freedom.

I. Freedom, Autonomy and Kant's Subject

Freedom *qua* the exercise of autonomy was Kant's central concern in his address to the question of *Aufklärung* (self-creation). We have seen that Kant defined *Aufklärung* by invoking an epistemic delineation of an inner connection between reason and freedom. Kant's appeal continued the propagation of the Enlightenment belief that an increase in rationality produces an increase in freedom. An integrated dynamic of two assumptions characterizes Kant's answers to questions of *Aufklärung*. These assumptions continue to exert their hold on contemporary liberal politics. The first is the idea that there exists a subjective core to individual identity whose source can be reasonably invoked as a guide to the moral life in general. The second idea manifests itself through the first. It holds that the natural freedoms of subjective identity are best met by alleviating repressive constraints, thus allowing the rational instantiation of true needs in a freedom to actualize "objective" interests. I would like to briefly outline one way in which these assumptions continue their currency in the politics of the present addressed by Foucault.

Kant defined *Aufklärung* as an individual and communal *Ausgang* from forms of thought which repress the "public use of one's reason in all matters."[7] Enlightenment is the freedom to make use of one's own reason. It is the freedom first, to recognize, as unwanted, restrictive limits to one's understanding. Second, it is the freedom to exercise irreducible measures of human subjectivity and character (ie. reason) in unbinding the repressive chains of immaturity in order to restore and expand an inherent human dignity.[8] Kant insists that the exercise of reason alone liberates us from dependence on the "guidance of another." He writes, "[t]he public use of reason must at all times be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men."[9] Reason requires the autonomy of critique and questioning in order to secure the goals of liberty - goals which are inherently moral and rational.

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7. Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" p. 59

8. ibid., p. 63

9. ibid., p. 59

Isaiah Berlin's famous distinction between "negative liberty" and "positive liberty" is helpful in clarifying the liberal conception of freedom Kant espoused. Berlin invoked his distinction some 174 years after Kant in order to try to understand the political and ideological ramifications liberalism's responses to totalitarian threats might entail. Rather than engage in a discussion of the merits or problems with Berlin's distinction, I would like to use his descriptions of 'negative' and 'positive liberty' to illuminate, as constitutive examples, those assumptions of freedom entailed by Kant's enlightenment answers.

'Negative liberty' is merely the absence of restrictions, or a freedom from external constraint. Under a negative conception of liberty, the individual is sacrosanct. It signifies the (political) space accorded an individual's pursuit of desires unfettered by external influence. 'Positive liberty' contrasts 'negative liberty' by signifying an 'internal freedom' to do what is in the best interest of furthering private autonomy. Positive liberty, like negative liberty, respects the jurisdiction of the individual, but describes "real" or "true" freedom in terms of the confluence between the need to discover one's own true interests and the freedom to actualize rationalized ends. Its positive sense concerns both the 'source or control' legitimate in determining someone's choice, and the processes adequate to realizing 'true' freedoms.[10]

At first glance, it would seem that the conception of freedom Kant entertains in "What is Enlightenment?", and indeed, the defining feature of what it means to be "enlightened", is covered by 'negative liberty.' Enlightenment, we learn in Kant's first lines, is freedom from the external constraints of another's tutelage, a tutelage which dictates to our understanding our own needs and interests. Kant continues, however, to state that, because there exist natural human tendencies of "laziness" and "cowardice," the vast majority of people defer to those rules and formulas which fetter us in an everlasting immaturity.[11] Only a select few "manage to free themselves from immaturity through the exercise of their minds, and yet proceed confidently."[12]

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10. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford University Press: London, 1969)p. 121-22

11. Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" p. 59

12. ibid.

Kant's distinction between those who exercise the courage of their own reason and those who "timidly" submit to their 'guardians' is manifest further in his discussion of 'the free use of public reason.' Recall that public reason is that exercise of thinking made before the "entire public of the *reading* world"[13] - in other words, before those few whose ability has been privileged by an education. It would appear then, that because public reason alone is necessary for enlightenment, and further, that only an educated few are capable of such courageous reason - though we should all try - a select few are charged with the responsibility of directing the public good. "[A] certain mechanism is necessary in many affairs which are run in the interest of the commonwealth by means of which some members of the commonwealth must conduct themselves passively in order that the government may direct them...to public ends, or at least restrain them from the destruction of those ends."[14] Positive liberty appears to also describe Kant's account of freedom. Having freed themselves from the fetters of immaturity, public reasoners are able to discern true needs from superfluous desires, and so engage human necessity in the true work of rational self-creation. Preserved is the modernist imperative of an internal connection between concomitant increases in freedom and reason.

Kant's account of freedom as self-actualization manifests aspects of both negative and positive liberty. *Aufklärung* entails a negative description in its imperative to autonomous self-making. We are only free in so far as we are not dependent on others. It also entails facets of positive liberty in so far as it is incumbent on public reason to legislate the best means to a public good and the historical progress of freedom. The task Kant saw as incumbent on the historical present was that of securing the political conditions necessary for personal freedom. *Aufklärung* is: first, the negative freedom from external limitation; and, second, the positive freedom to choose to exercise ones capacities of reason and understanding (ie. knowledge) in the service of subjective autonomy.

Central to Foucault's genealogical critique as a re-thinking of modernity is the attempt to disrupt the traditional frameworks of humanist liberty invoked by Kant, and more contemporaneously, by Berlin.

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13. ibid., p. 60; emphasis added

14. ibid., 60

Foucault's articulations of freedom as a practice of problematizing one's own discursive present-ness takes us beyond the static neo-Kantian formulations continually generated in the West today. Genealogy's concern in addressing modernity and the critical attitude of self-creation (*Aufklärung*) as a problem of liberty rather than as a problem for knowledge makes the disruptions of these formulations possible.

II. Questioning 'Self-Knowledge' as 'Self-Mastery'

Enlightenment is, for Kant, an historical event: it being the moment at which Western rationality declares its autonomy and sovereignty.[15] *Aufklärung* declares autonomy through the exercise of reason alone in making the laws of government. It is both a private and a public process, but the end of the process of coming to maturity is one in which self-mastery is the result. Only by being fully 'cognizant' can we become mature. Kant's account of the human dialectic from immaturity to maturity instills the imperative of self-mastery as the culmination of the historical process of self-actualization. Berlin echoes this Kantian imperative by describing positive liberty as deriving "from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master."[16]

The important thing Foucault draws attention to is the discrepancy or tension between the critical recognition of the possibility for freedom described in terms of "self-creation", and Kant's subsequent critical de-lineation of the alleged epistemic boundaries through which self-constitution as mastery may be realized. The productive moment of 'self-knowledge *qua* self-mastery' is problematized as an epistemic 'object of thought.' Foucault uses the aporias he identifies in Kant's answers to the question of *Aufklärung* to transfigure the idea of modernity, not as a problem for knowledge and reason, but as a history of the practices and possibilities of freedom.[17] In a sense, it is the reversal of Platonism. Plato urged the thinker to attend to the eternal and unchanging world of the forms. Conversely, Foucault turns the critical gaze to

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15. Foucault, "Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution" trans. C. Gordon, *Economy and Society* 15 (1) February 1986 p. 95

16. "Two Concepts of Liberty", p. 131

17. Recall from Part II, the brief discussion of Foucault's entry into the question of *Aufklärung* through considering it a question of power rather than knowledge - See footnote 101. The discussion here continues that theme with the added dimension that genealogy is the problematization of freedom as a problem of power. Genealogy is that critical approach which allows Foucault to politicize freedom as specific forms or apparatuses of power and knowledge.

the events at our feet - towards the practices, forms and structures of thought which have made us what we are.[18] In his own words, Foucault attempts to emphasize:

> ...the question of the present as a philosophical event incorporating within it the philosopher who speaks of it. If one cares to think of philosophy as a form of discursive practice with its own history, it seems to me that with [Kant's] text on *Aufklärung* one sees philosophy...for the first time problematizing its own discursive present-ness: a present-ness which it interrogates as an event, an event whose meaning, value and philosophical singularity it is required to state, and in which it is to elicit at once its own *raison d' être* and the foundation of what it has to say. And thereby one can see that for the philosopher to pose the question of his own inclusion in this present will no longer be a question of his adherence to a doctrine or a tradition; it will no longer even simply be the question of his belonging to a human community in general, but that of his membership of a certain 'we', a we corresponding to a cultural ensemble characteristic of his own contemporaneity.[19]

Foucault proposes that 'critique not constitute a transcendental limit against which practice is analyzed, but rather should engage the practical limits and historical conditions against which subjects analyze themselves.' He gives the term "transfiguration" to this critical practice - "transfiguration entails not an annulment of reality but a difficult interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom."[20] The exercise of critique is the work of transfiguration, of changing the givens of a problem, "seeking to give new impetus, as far and as possible to the undefined work of freedom."[21] The work of philosophy, consequently, is to reflexively promote these transfigurations. "What is philosophy today - philosophical activity, I mean - if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?"[22]

In bringing thought to bear on itself, Foucault posed three questions for critique. He understood his own work to have revolved around the questions: "How are we constituted as subjects of our

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18. see Foucault's review, "Theatrum Philosophicum" in which he characterizes Deleuze as the paradigm philosopher of the event. He takes the opportunity in this essay to explicate his own thoughts along in similar lines. The essay is re-printed in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* ed. D. Bouchard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977)

19. Foucault, "Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution" p. 89

20. WE. p. 41

21. ibid., p. 50

22. UP., p. 9

knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?"[23] As axes of knowledge (truth), power, and ethics, these questions constitute three domains of critical possibility:

> First, an historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, an historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, an historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents.[24]

In light of these questions, Foucault frames his critical project in distinctly Kantian terms; for these questions and positions exist alongside and against three of Kant's own constitutive domains - What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope for?[25] His questions are Kants' counterparts. But they are counter-parts in a manner which emphasizes the political ethos of critique within a reflexive historicity. Critique's attention to the historical conditions of the present is turned in on itself and analyzed in terms of immanent historical criteria. Interestingly, because of this reflexivity and the honesty it demands of thought, Foucault believed his own philosophical critique to be one which 'thinks modernity against modernity.'[26]

Foucault's criticism centres around the Enlightenment's construction of the problem of self-constitution as an epistemologically answerable fact of rational self-government and justifiable legitimacy. Like Nietzsche and Adorno, Foucault's philosophy of the *dispositif* attempts to show that modes of existence have to be assessed according to immanent criteria, according to the historical content of their 'possibilities', liberty or creativity, without any appeal to transcendental values.[27] It is these immanent criteria Foucault focuses on in analyzing the *dispositifs* which give form to the epistemic constellations of

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23. WE., p. 49

24. Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* 2nd ed., H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p.237 - hereafter 'GE'

25. see James Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Towards an Ethics for Thought* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1990) p. 18; and Kimberley Hutchings, p. 103

26. AT. p. 88. This claim has interesting repercussions for those who think Foucault's work is best described as postmodern.

27. see Deleuze (1992), p. 163

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objective delimitation and moral eschatology. Foucault's analysis of the modern aporia that result from the attempt to answer the question 'What is Man?' by appeal to transcendental values, is a case in point.

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In his attempts to "transform critique conducted in the form of a necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression,"[28] Foucault addresses a number of important assumptions at work in Kant's answers to Enlightenment. They are, primarily, threefold. Note that they also correspond to the three questions Foucault poses for critique.

First, as a negative liberty positively exercised, Enlightenment assumes a rational, subjective ground whose natural capacities need be given unencumbered liberty. Foucault describes this classically liberal idea of subjectivity as follows:

> ...the idea that there does exist a nature or a human foundation which, as a result of a certain number of historical, social, or economic processes, found itself concealed, alienated or imprisoned in and by some repressive mechanism. In [this] hypothesis it would suffice to unloosen these repressive locks so that man can be reconciled with himself, once again find his nature or re-new contact with his roots and restore a full and positive relationship with himself."[29]

Second, the true description and instantiation of knowable subjective grounds and capacities is necessary in positively ensuring and defining liberty. Only when the political conditions necessary for personal freedom are in place, can an individual be secure in the knowledge that the epistemic conditions for true autonomy are not being compromised. Third, Enlightenment liberalism posits that the increase in reason's autonomy in modern epistemic critique is sufficient to secure the historical progress of moral self-actualization. In other words, only in so far as reason can truly describe the subjective conditions of autonomy as a workable and consistent 'self-knowledge' can we 'restore a full and positive relationship with ourselves.'

The above three features constitute a significant semantic constellation - a triad if you will - between subjectivity, truth and reason. The fundamental effect Kant's description of autonomy (self-

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28. WE., p. 50

29. M. Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom", *The Final Foucault* Bernauer and Rasmussen eds., (MIT Press: Cam., Mass, 1987) p.2 - hereafter ECS

creation as a function of self-knowledge) has for ethics and politics was one defined by the tain of the Enlightenment's emphasis on an epistemic history of reason. Kant's definitive mantle of maturity could only be secured through a process directed to knowing oneself - the individual subject - as a "substance," as a natural kind to whom rational, universal and binding truths would prove exhaustive. Hence the need to be the master of one's domain.[30]

Consciousness became, for modernity, the necessary ground of exploration and delineation. The discrepancy Kant created between historico-political critique and epistemic critique further entrenched the modernist imperative of a subjective knowledge of consciousness.

> [The] question of *Aufklärung* since Kant, because of Kant, and likely because of the slippage [*décalage*] between *Aufklärung* and critique that he introduced, was essentially posed in terms of knowledge; ...and, in departing from the historic destiny of knowledge at the moment of modern science, followed a procedure of analysis one would call an inquiry into the legitimacy of historical modes of knowing. More simply still: what false idea did knowledge make of itself, and to what excessive use was it found exposed, to what domination consequently was it found tied.?"[31]

Foucault's critique of the necessary conditions of possible consciousness challenged the determinacy of transcendental explanation, and de-stabilized the ground upon which a transcendental method attempted to secure a foothold, primarily by showing what histories and questions such a method and ethic ignores. Continually replicated, yet hidden by the transcendental method and apparatuses of subjectivity/truth/reason, is the critical possibility of examining how productive histories and technologies (specifically those of Christian self-decipherment, and the scientific naturalization of human possibility and limits) have structured modern subjects as self-consciously ethical agents.

Foucault's emphasis, therefore, on that facet of Enlightenment critique which provides a permanent possibility of questioning, is an approach to thought which, while refusing the dominant cognitive strains of neo-Kantian modernism, still preserves the exercise of thinking as the work of freedom. What Foucault's work on Kant's critique stresses, and ironically carries forward from Kant's own work, is that the

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30. Foucault would have had fun with the famous *Seinfeld* episode which explores masturbation as a problem of character, control and self-mastery. For his rather less humorous, but probably more sophisticated, discussion of perversion, sexuality, and the power structures of "self-knowledge", see Part Two, Chp. 2 "The Perverse Implantation", *History of Sexuality Vol. I* pp. 36 - 49

31. WC., p. 393

exercise of freedom is not to be engaged in the futile attempts of thought to escape politics. 'Politics' here refers to people living together, and becoming conscious of themselves and their place in the world by communicating.[32] For Foucault, language, not consciousness, is the constitutive and irreducibly complex matrix of thought.[33] By examining the history of language, practices, and texts we can begin to approach the enlightenment problems of self-making and freedom without replicating the aporias and illusions of a finitistic analytic. The difficult work of freedom - it is a work, not a release - is only exercised by self-consciously entering the fray of this political dispersion.

III. Critique as Genealogy

The philosophical tradition since Kant has attempted to placate the antimonies of disruption and alterity by ever encompassing complexities of singularity: "..the promise that one day the subject - in the form of historical consciousness - will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode."[34] How does genealogical critique differ? Genealogy disturbs the will to truth by problematizing the virtue of an *Ursprung* [35] 'demi-urge': "...it rejects the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and

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32. Mikhail Bakhtin describes this constitutive embeddedness: "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. To be means to communicate....To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary: looking inside himself, he looks into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another...I cannot imagine without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another within myself." - see M. Bakhtin *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1984) p. 287

33. James D. Faubion, "Introduction" *Essential Works of Foucault Vol. 2: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology* (The New Press: New York, 1998) p. xxi. We have also to be aware that 'language' is used very broadly here - practices, as much as utterances, have a 'language' because they too are involved in communicating. Art and architecture being perhaps the paradigm examples of non-linguistic textual communication.

34. Foucault., "Introduction",*The Archaeology of Knowledge* trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (Pantheon Books: New York 1972) p. 12

35. Foucault's use of *Ursprung* designates "origin" in the sense of 'essence'. He contrasts *Ursprung* with both *Herkunft* (descent) and *Entstehung* (emergence). The double movement of genealogical critique manifests itself in the use of the later two senses of the word 'origin.' The former, Foucault disavows, as it denotes the transcendental epistemology of humanist politics. See footnote no. 2.

indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for 'origins.'"[36] Foucault states that the genealogical methodology:

> ...will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say and do as so many historical events....[T]his critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know, but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing or thinking what we are do or think.[37]

The critico-historical attention to the contexts, discourses and practices of the present is both the methodological form, and the finality, of Foucault's proposal.[38] Genealogy is concerned with history's constitution of the representational framework (*Gestell*) of the present. The present may be thought as constitutive of those constellations of ideas whose interactive frameworks manifest how we think of ourselves as knowing and telling agents. Such frameworks are generated by practical manifestations of production (governments, hospitals, prisons, families). They reflect the ways in which practices produce how we think of ourselves as agents within present moments - namely as subjects. By problematizing the metaphysics of accepted values, ahistorical concepts and self-evident 'facts,' genealogy engages the historical conditions of our existence in a conversation of "...erudite knowledge and local memories." A conversation of this sort "...allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today."[39] Thus, in its methods of analysis, the genealogical conversation challenges the precepts by which philosophy, in placing the autonomy of reason outside the vagaries of the concrete, has attempted to maintain the privileged power of its epistemic politics of truth.

Two general modes of genealogy are at work in Foucault. John Ransom calls these 'historical

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36. NGH., p. 140 "Origin" is in quotes here, for reasons explained in footnote 2.

37. WE., p. 46

38. "...genealogy is both the reason and the target of analyzing discourses as events, and what I am trying to show is how those discursive events have determined in a certain way what constitutes our present and what constitutes ourselves...the genealogy is the finality of the analysis." see p. 105, ct. 92 and 93, chapter 4 in *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy* , Michael Mahon (State University of New York Press: Albany 1992). Excerpted from "The Culture of the Self", a lecture given by Foucault in Berkeley, 1983. Tape and transcript available from Language Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley.

39. Foucault, "Two Lectures" *Power/Knowledge.*, ed. Colin Gordon (Pantheon: New York 1980) p. 83

genealogy' and 'political genealogy'.[40] Historical genealogy is aimed at making us question the unconscious gestures and assumptions that make up how we live in the world. Political genealogy points to a future kind of politics that remains based in an embedded historical investigation. These two modes mirror the doubled gaze of genealogy which examines forgotten and neglected contingencies while at the same time looking to the ways in which historical apparatuses continue to produce objects for thought, how they may be re-thought, and so determine new creative possibilities. It is important to note, though, that the two modes of genealogy, while useful distinctions, are both part and parcel of the same form critique - an ontology of the present.

Foucault distinguishes genealogy or "effective history" from 'traditional history.' Traditional history is considered by Foucault, as it was by Nietzsche, to be a form of Platonism. 'Platonic history', or 'traditional history', is characterized by a search for the truth. It is a history that strives to uncover an essence upon whose primordial constancy is predicated a progressive evolution of particulars. It is one whose orientation is that of "the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies."[41] The traditional historian traces the representational progress of conceptual and practical continuity; continuity defined in terms of an ever closer approximation to truth. Were she to study sexual history, the traditional historian would attempt to discover a universal or constant trait which not only reveals an origin, but an origin in terms of which the truth may be said to have been discovered. For example: were we to find an evolutionary basis for differences in sexual behaviour, then it might be possible to better understand, manage or treat sexual manifestations as they present themselves. The traditional historian's task engages an empirical enframing (*Gestell*) in which "natural evidency" secures political legitimacy.

What Foucault attempts to do with a genealogical analysis of history is problematize the traditional metaphysics at work in 'Plato's historian.' This does not mean that historical analysis becomes

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40. John Ransom, *Foucault's Discipline*, (Duke University Press: Durham, 1997)p. 85

41. NGH., p. 140

ineffectual - "[t]he genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of origin... ."[42] What Foucault's historical attention does is confront material forces within a reflexively acknowledged interpretational framework. The constant in all of Foucault's attempts at diagnosing the present - and indeed that which makes possible his political critique - is his unfailing methodological scrutiny of historical representation. Foucault's philosophical attention does not predicate its critical value, like that of the traditional historian, on an ability to discover, for example, indubitable tenets of consistency and derivability. Rather than take as a laudable goal, say, consistency, the very notion is itself problematized as to its own origins and importance. How did consistency become a methodological means to directing epistemic ends? What were the specific contexts and events in which a concept like consistency secured a grasp on theorizing and practice? How did increasing scientific attention to mechanism, functionalism and rationality produce, protect and enhance the viability of consistency's theoretical parameters? Did the concomitant rise in: a) secular state oriented, capitalist political economies; b) individualism and legal protections of civil liberties; c) an emphasis on natural rights; and d) rationality's role in expressing and describing these humanist values, have any effect on the exercise of methodological consistency in thinking performative possibility? How did consistency manage to become a condition for the possibility of truth? How do we look upon subjects who are, so to speak, inconsistent?

Such queries are always prevalent in the methodological form of Foucault's work. Questions like these analyze the contexts, and constellations of relations which make possible a network of very real, very concrete practices. No theoretical or practical manifestation is taken in isolation. A logic of truth which might direct understanding is not sought and subsequently implemented. Nor is a calculus of rational decision making heralded as a better means to attaining an end. Critical attention is instead given to the theoretical practices and efforts which sculpted truth and rationality into the various forms present today. Nothing is considered necessary or *a priori*. And no theory or theoretical orientation is grounded in either first principles or adequate methodologies. Knowledge, for Foucault, is a product of the social, political and environmental contexts within which its discursive possibility arises.

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42. ibid., p. 144

Foucault was not the first to engage in a genealogical critique. Neither, of course, did he coin the phrase, nor first engage its unique anti-metaphysical critique. Nietzsche's philosophical attack on the traditional Enlightenment privileging of reason and origins stands as one of the pillars of Foucauldian critique.[43] And, like Nietzsche too, genealogy, for Foucault, has a primarily ethical motivation. For Nietzsche, the primary task of genealogy was to trace the descent (*Herkunft*) of values, and examine how these morals structured peoples responses to the world and one another. Values, for Nietzsche, are those concepts that the Platonic and Christian Western tradition revere: truth, goodness, and reason. Genealogy's study of the *Herkunft* (descent) of values maintains Nietzsche's anti-Platonic metaphysics by replacing the constancy of the Idea with the discontinuity of an endless repetition of forces, each struggling to form an interpretable reality.

> [Genealogy] seeks the subtle, singular and sub-individual marks that might possibly intersect in them to form a network that is difficult to unravel. ...Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning - numberless beginnings whose faint traces and hints of colour are readily seen by an historical eye.[44]

In Nietzsche's words:

> ...the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart; whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again re-interpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed and re-directed by some power superior to it; all events in the organic world are a subduing, a *becoming master*, and all subduing and becoming master involves a fresh interpretation, an adaptation through which any previous 'meaning' and 'purpose' are necessarily obscured or even obliterated. [45]

Value for Nietzsche, is necessarily predicated on interpretation, and interpretation itself on an act of will. "Whatever has value in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature - nature is always value-less, but has been given value at some time, as a present - and it was we who gave and bestowed it."[46] Ideals like truth are thus not notions that have a site of origin in Platonic forms, or more

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43. The other pillars being: Heidegger; the philosophers of science Canguillhem and Bachelard; the literary theorists and novelists Blanchot, Bataille, Roussel and Char; and, Kant.

44. NGH., 145

45. F. Nietzsche,*On the Genealogy of Morals* II, § 12., trans. W, Kauffman (Vintage: New York, 1989) p. 77

46. F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kauffman, (Vintage: New York, 1974) p. 301

recently, in the nature of things. For Nietzsche, the emergence of such ideals is part of the interpretive will expressing itself in our world. We produce truth, freedom and right from our active willing. Just as our interpretive frameworks change, so too do the values we cherish within such frameworks. Genealogy then is a historical method for mapping networks of interpretive frameworks in willful struggle with one another.

The genealogical emphasis on "struggle" is important for two reasons. First, the traditional historian's metaphysical task is to search for the origin (*Ursprung*) of stable forms and identities in existence. The 'discovery' of an original truth enables the epistemic appropriation of a "...truth fully adequate to [an event's] nature."[47] With such 'discoveries' a pure passivity of being remains central to an event's understanding. The return to the purity of essence is deemed a return to the 'real' and 'unaffected' essence of truth's original masking. But neither Nietzsche nor Foucault extend any faith in such "detested, narrowminded origins. *Pudenda origo*."[48] Because knowledge is a product only of competing interpretive frameworks, it is implausible to claim any sense of the "pure", the "essential" or the "real" - "...there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piece-meal fashion from alien forms."[49] Events, theories, and actions are the product of contingent forces and struggles rather than a progressive refinement of essential rational methods.

> ...history will not discover a forgotten identity, eager to be reborn, but a complex system of distinct multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis. ...[Critique] is no longer a question of judging the past in the name of a truth that only we can possess in the present; but risking the destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge....This does not mean, in terms of a critical procedure, that the will to truth is limited by the intrinsic finitude of cognition, but that it loses all sense of limitations and all claim to truth in its unavoidable sacrifice of the subject of knowledge.[50]

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47. NGH., p. 142

48. Nietzsche's *The Dawn* as quoted in NGH., p. 141

49. ibid.

50. Ibid., pp. 162-64; Foucault is, of course, following Nietzsche very closely. In light of the above passage from "The Art of Telling the Truth," how is Foucault different from Nietzsche? The difference does not exist quite as forcibly between their comparable invocations of genealogy. It is more obvious in what the subjective *ascesis* means for each philosopher. Foucault disavows Nietzsche's claim that Socrates's

Secondly, whereas traditional historical analysis looks at the grand events of progressive history - wars, reigns, statutes, and 'discoveries' - genealogy's anti-metaphysical gaze challenges pre-suppositions of progress, utopias, ends or essences. Rather than challenge the specific contents of a traditional historian's findings - the revelations of a previously unknown manuscript, the veracity of x's claims about y - 'effective history' problematizes the conceptual matrix within which the historian's gaze is claimed to have effective purchase. The goals, pre-suppositions and the "reasons" for investigation are placed in question by genealogy, and as such, it examines the "singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality."[51] It looks to "love", "instincts" and "errors." "A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their 'origins,' will never neglect as inaccessible the vissitudes of history....it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning."[52]

Genealogy is a discourse of movement, of meticulous fluidity, wherein the investigation of the "gray...field of entangled and confused parchments"[53] is at once a construction of the active work of the gaze as an ethical maintenance of the tension within problematized constellations of authority; while at the same time, it creates positive possibilities in the fields such an authority conceals. Here we should note genealogy's reaction against the philosophies of consciousness *pace* Kant, Fichte, Hegel, even Marx and phenomenology.[54] There is no grand march of history, only a confused, mundane plurality of countless events and wills. And at the centre of genealogy's gaze is the recognition of its own embeddedness in an interpretive present.

> The isolation of different points of emergence does not conform to the successive configurations of an identical meaning; rather, they result from substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals. If interpretation were the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an

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dictum "know thyself" invoked an epistemic obligation. For Foucault, though he inaugurated a genealogical critique Foucault furthers, Nietzsche's thought did remain far more psychologistic, and thereby concerned with the instinctive 'nature of man,' than Foucault's ever would. Perhaps, for Foucault, Nietzsche's genealogical critique did not go far enough in disrupting anthropological philosophy's transcendental legitimations.

51. ibid., p.139

52. ibid., p. 144

53. NGH., p. 139

54. see "Truth and Power", *Power/Knowledge*, pp.115-118

> origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history: the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts...the emergence of different interpretations.[55]

Genealogy can probably best be characterized by a appeal to what it is not. A negative characterization enables a number of things. First, by emphasizing what it does not do, genealogy may be understood as an oppositional methodology. It is not engaged in defining, in any way, a positive demarcation of how things must be - of how and what constitutes 'knowledge,' of the best means to discovering the real, of encoding true meaning. Secondly, as a negatively understood opposition to traditional attempts at defining a positive basis for meaning, genealogy continually engages the interpretation of texts, signs, narratives, etc. as a problematizing device. Genealogy interrogates the theoretical "will to know," so that theory ceases to express or apply to practice. Consequently, it does not render itself as a totalizing methodology. It is one that enfolds the dangers of totality and points to possible multiple potentialities. Third, genealogy's negative characterization as *problematiques* prevents its own totalization. It reflexively acknowledges its own perspectivism and promotes an intellectually specific ethic of continually re-evaluating one's own engagement within games or figures of truth. Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, understanding genealogy through an attention to what it is not enables an ethically creative engagement to become possible. That is, by wrenching apart a positive substantiation of the rational means to characterizing a sovereign, universal subject, the critical activity of the question becomes, itself, the freedom of the possibility to create always anew. At the hands of the critical question, evidence and universality are marked and located in a particular history of practices. The genealogical method then, opens itself as an ethical practice that is made manifest precisely through the creative activity of questioning and problematizing.

While Foucault's approach to critical philosophy is thoroughly Nietzschean, his path is not identical to that laid out by Nietzsche. Foucault shys away from Nietzsche's psychologistic renderings of the wills as, the will to truth, the will to power, and the instinct's dumbing of the 'herd.' It might be

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55. NGH, p. 151 - 52

argued that Foucault is more thoroughly Nietzschean than Nietzsche.[56] With Foucault, there is never any mention of positing a 'human nature,' nor are there any of Nietzsche's quasi-transcendental, explanatory colourings in the forms of the eternal return, herd instincts or willful drives. The Nietzsche important for Foucault is the genealogist; the historian who problematizes knowledge and truth as intimately entangled within productions of power. It is Nietzsche the genealogist who provides for Foucault the critical methodologies in terms of which he is able to analyze the plurality of dissonant and contingent forces which produce and render our most accepted and cherished values.

Nietzsche's genealogy offers itself to Foucault as a *Lebensphilosophie*, a philosophy of life. Practice and creative activity are the fabric of genealogy's weaving, and it is precisely with the Nietzschean critical tool, that Foucault orients his own critical service. "What [Nietzsche's genealogy] really does is to entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchize and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects."[57]

With its anti-metaphysical emphasis on the contingent and dissonant production of interpretive struggles, and the plurality of points of influence through which events are made manifest, Nietzsche's genealogical method enables Foucault to practically engage with the "tragic structure of the Western world." For Foucault, Nietzsche revealed a tragic structure which constitutes both a history and the crisis of the western world. This tragic structure is none other than the very silencing, refusing and forgetting of the tragic - and often sacred - within our midst: madness, illness, extremity, the criminal.[58] The tragedy of modernity is that we continually attempt to reduce, appropriate and normalize ("naturalize") that which does

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56. "[*Discipline and Punish*] reads like a historical case study of the theory of punishment in the second essay of the *Genealogy*, [and] is perhaps a better example of historical genealogy than Nietzsche's own work." David Couzens Hoy, "Nietzsche, Hume and the Genealogical Method" in *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker* ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1986) p. 21

57. Foucault, "Two Lectures" *Power/Knowledge* p. 83

58. Mahon., p. 20. We must remember too that Heidegger's work had a similar importance for Foucault in terms of expressing the tragedy of modernity. Interestingly, Foucault ceded that Nietzsche came fully alive to him after he read Heidegger's works on Nietzsche. See pages 30-1 of Didier Eribon's biography of Foucault, *Michel Foucault* trans. Betsy Wing (Harvard University Press: Camb. Mass., 1991)

not easily fit within the categories of our understanding or morality. The very states or acts which by themselves cannot be understood become fearfully normalized as deviances from a natural, and therefore, intelligible and beautiful, norm. They are "...all those elements that resist assimilation to the bourgeois form of life, and to the routines of everyday life, just as they evade the methodological grasp of the sciences."[59]

While Nietzsche's construction of the genealogical task is decidedly more psychologistic than Foucault's, the Foucauldian genealogy is less a study of the will's willing, than it is of the relational means by which knowledge *produces* relations of influence and power. Power, for Foucault, is a productive force more than it is limiting, violent or repressive. Unlike Nietzsche's centering of value's production in the act of an individual's willing, Foucault incorporates the production of meaning and knowledge within "...a multiple and mobile field of force relations, wherein far reaching, but never completely stable, effects of domination are produced."[60]

In problematizing philosophies of rational consciousness, Foucault recognized that traditional liberal and Marxist responses to problems of truth and power were now neither effective nor plausible. *Discipline and Punish* (1976) marks a stage of political thinking in which liberal and Marxist options were no longer engaged as the only competing critiques available. For Foucault, liberalism and Marxism are not conceptually equipped to analyze structures of domination in modern society. Liberal theory attempts to emancipate the individual from limiting or unreasonable strictures which constrain the essential locus of rational being. Two of liberalism's distinctively modern assumptions are the belief in individualism and the meliorist influence of truth. The fundamental moral primacy of the person is sealed by a true core identity that is unaffected by constructive influence (power). If it is exogenously shaped, then it is so only negatively. For truth and stability, we have to look inward to our true inner selves. The second assumption, dependent on the first, is that deviance from a person's individual core or true nature ("the

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59. Habermas, "The French Path to Post-Modernity: Bataille Between Eroticism and General Economics." Lecture 8, in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1987) p. 212

60. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol 1.*, trans, R. Hurley (Vintage: New York 1990) p. 102

natural rights of man") is evidence of power's corrupting influence. Rationally grounded and theoretically complete understandings of individuals and society will affirm the improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements.[61] "As bearers of a classical liberal legacy, we are predisposed to assume that whatever is traversed by power is also corrupted by it. Power...distorts truth. If an event, a thing, or a way of being human cannot be separated from functions of power, then we feel fairly certain that we are not in possession of truth with regard to that event, thing, or person."[62] However, *Discipline and Punish* examines the ways in which disciplinary mechanisms produce persons, as epistemic domains: the delinquent, the soldier, the worker, the school child, even the family member. Foucault's critical work is not a text about what is external to its readers. It is a discourse whose engagement encompasses and places in question every one of us - "[t]his book is intended as a correlative history of the modern soul."[63]

Marxist critical theory, though emphasizing socially situated subjective construction, attempts to more equitably liberate the social individual *qua* community, from the iniquities generated by oppressive modes of production, which, as political practices, have all too often the capacity to create a rational expression of productive totality. In other words, for Marx, liberalism is not correctly rational enough. Both still assume the enlightenment triad of subjectivity, rationality and truth as completely expressive of the human moral universe.

Mark Poster argues that Foucault's recognition of the limitations to Marxist critiques of liberal traditions is expressed through *Discipline and Punish's* critical attention to discursive and practical modes of domination. While the Marxist may attempt to more rationally construct universal and total conditions for the maintenance of rational (though political) subjects, Foucault constructs a means of de-totalized

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61. John Gray, *Liberalism* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1986) p. x

62. Ladelle McWhorter., "Self-Overcoming in Foucault's Discipline and Punish" in *Transitions in Continental Philosophy* ed. A.B. Dallery, S.H. Watson with E.M. Bower (State University of New York Press: Albany 1994) p. 35-6

63. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* , trans. A. Sheridan (Vintage: New York, 1977) p. 23 Notice that Foucault does not use the word "corrective." *Discipline and Punish* engages philosophical genealogy as a diagnostic critique. It does not offer, nor attempt to offer, prescriptions for answering or relieving a current crisis. But, the very exercise of historical critique's non-transcendentalist reading shifts our attitudes to, and ways of, seeing problems for thought.

investigation that not only localizes particular investigation, but severely limits truth claims.[64] "The panopticon, as Foucault calls the system of domination specific to prisons, cannot be analyzed from the Marxist historical standpoint because the Marxist categories of alienation and exploitation address only those features of domination which concern the act of labour."[65] Neither do liberal attempts to alleviate impasses standing in the way of individual freedoms adequately contextualize the individual within specific historical constructions. Indeed, both liberal and Marxist traditions attempt to construct rational systems for adjudicating the best way to go about coping in the world. Each universalizes their critiques with claims to truth and emancipatory reason, thus totalizing the historical field and excluding competing critical perspectives. What they give with their claims to civil liberties, tolerance and reflexive social history, they also take away with an exclusivity of hegemonic theory. The 'effective historian' or genealogist, for Foucault, should be constantly aware of her own interpretive situatedness and as such not attempt to describe the entirety of the investigative domain. As an example of mature genealogy, *Discipline and Punish* thus re-directs the historians' focus away from totalities, and towards particularities. In so doing it presents a challenge to the traditional presuppositions of investigative possibility.

As the critical methodology of *Discipline and Punish*, genealogy's conceptual strength lies in the way in which it problematizes the precepts and frameworks of more traditional theorizing. It shows how such discourses, at one level, presuppose metaphysical insights that they purport to have outgrown at another.[66] Although Foucault had been seriously engaged in historical genealogy for at least seven or eight years prior to the publication of *Discipline and Punish*, it was not until the latter was published that Foucault's genealogical methodology reached its critical maturity. As well as being an examination of exogenous and endogenous changes carceral practices have as mediums for ameliorating social deviancy, (it

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64. Mark Poster,*Critical Theory and Poststructuralism* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca 1989) p. 73

65. ibid., p. 72

66. "Foucault's originality among the great thinkers of our century lay in his refusal to convert our finitude into the basis for new certainties." "The Final Foucault and his Ethics" by Paul Veyne, trans. Catherine Porter and Arnold Davidson, *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Autumn, 1993) p. 5

is that but also a lot more) *Discipline and Punish* problematizes the very stability of the ground upon which enlightenment discourses (most prominently liberalism and Marxism) predicate their effectiveness.

This emphasis by Foucault on social construction, historical contingency, and discursive practice is very different from the philosophical precepts by which the Enlightenment and modernity characterizes itself. We are urged by Foucault to refuse what we are. We need to incorporate a "...refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries."[67] For Foucault, we are subjects precisely as active products, and thus as participants in the maintenance of our social environments, institutions and knowledge practices, and ultimately in the ways in which we think of ourselves.

Foucault's historical analyses of madness and psychiatry, the sick and the hospital, the criminal and penology, the "un-gendered", and sexuality are all products of thinking the tragic, thinking the forgotten and thinking the moralized. Foucault's analyses are as much about the production and effects of denying the undeniable, as they are an examination of the moral spaces that construct how we think of ourselves. The asylum is a space for morally engineering madness, the prison a morally structured space of normalizing surveillance and discipline, the sanctioning of sexual acts and behaviour a moral construction of the body as subject, a specific, knowable and natural subject, one whose limits can be rationally and epistemically defined. The ethical impetus within Foucault's genealogy provides an enriched, empowered and amplified alternity through the problematization of accepted knowledge and truth. Genealogy allows Foucault to examine how relations between historically contingent constructions are constituted by, and continually re-construct, discursive praxis with respect to how we view ourselves as subjects and agents. "What I mean by genealogy is both the reason and the target of analyzing those discourses as events, and what I am trying to show is how those discursive events have determined in a certain way what constitutes our present and what constitutes ourselves - either our knowledge, our practices, our type of rationality our relationship to ourselves or to others... ."[68]

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67. Foucault, "The Subject and Power" in 'Afterword' to *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* H.L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow., 2nd edition (U. of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1983) p. 216

68. Foucault, "The Culture of the Self", partially transcribed in Mahon, p. 105

For Foucault the construction of what we are in modernity develops from a tripartite axis of relational and practicing discursivity. We are created as knowing subjects through a relational interplay of truth, power and ethics.[69] The theoretical and very concrete practical relation of truth, knowledge and ethics is constitutive of the discursive frame and limits of possibility in terms of which thinking defines both the world and the agent doing the thinking. Traditionally, the epistemic delineation of action and ethical practice has been medially constructed for subjects by a work of rationalization in terms of which figures of truth and knowledge constructs legitimacy. Genealogy approaches truth, knowledge or subjectivity not as entities alone or in isolation, but precisely as constellations or active nexuses of relations, each constructing and supporting the other. We may only speak of truth by speaking of subjects, ethics and knowledge. We may speak of subjects only by analyzing knowledge, ethics and truth.

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Foucault locates the epistemological grammar of a the governing *volontè de savoir* in confessional and reductive technologies. As we noted in Part II, these technologies express themselves in the reproduction of biopolitics. Confessional and naturalistic technologies have either identified : a) truths about essential subjects, or b) identified an authentic practice of free subjects.[70] When it is noted that these technologies fail to provide what they promise, the humanist discourse which is produced by the *volontés aux savoir/verité/pouvoir*, determines to refine and intensify the theoretical and practical instantiations of these technologies as means of coping.[71] Dreyfus and Rabinow aptly describe this dynamic:

> Biopower spread under the banner of making people healthy and protecting them. When there was a resistance or failure to achieve its stated aims, this was construed as further proof of the need to reinforce and extend the power of experts. A technical matrix was established. By definition, there ought to be a way of solving any technical problem. Once this matrix was established, the spread of bio-power was assured, for there was nothing else to appeal to: any other standards could be shown to be abnormal or to present merely technical problems. We are promised normalization

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69. Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" p.237

70. Possible philosophical examples of a) are: Cartesian metaphysics, realist ontologies, and socio-biology; and, of b) Habermas' ideal speech situation, and Rawls' ideal of "overlapping consensus."

71. Owen, *Maturity and Modernity* p. 196

and happiness through science and the law. When they fail, this only justifies the need for more of the same.[72]

In "What is Critique?", Foucault incorporates these ideas in an analysis of the "Christian pastoral." Unique to Christian Europe, Foucault argues, the 'Christian pastoral' is the idea that, in his or her actions, and more importantly conscience, every individual needs to be guided towards salvation through a relation of obedience.[73] For Foucault, the historical rise of individualism implicates, within those mechanisms whose articulations convene precepts of self-constitution, a concomitant emphasis in, and concern for, the 'government of men.' Individualism and the concern for governing are necessarily co-joined movements. Each needs the other in erecting delineations of maturity. Guidance, obedience and government orient their directives through discourses of truth: truth as dogma (scriptural dictates), truth as reductive knowledge (biology, economics, medicine, penology, etc...) and truth comprised of rules for techniques of self-discovery (methodologies of examination, confession, ascetic practices of denial, etc...). The governing of individuals through disciplines of knowledge, and under the aegis of guidance, constitutes a pedagogical attempt to direct conscience. It is, essentially, the shaping of how persons think of themselves as agents, selves and subjects. The methods a modern subject uses to construct him or herself as a subject are concentrated as "specific 'truth-games' related to specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves."[74] Foucault's interest in how human beings come to consider themselves subjects - subjects of actions, relationships to others and so a subject to him or her self[75] - reflects both genealogy's local perspective, and how an ethics of existence is generated.

Foucault uses the term "governmentality" to refer to the constellation of relationships constitutive of the Enlightenment's appropriation of 'subjective self-understanding.' The term is used to analyze the relationships between 'technologies of domination' of others and those knowledge apparatuses people use in

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72. Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* 2nd.ed., p. 196

73. WC., p. 383

74. M. Foucault, "Technologies of the Self" *Technologies of the Self* ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) p. 18 - hereafter TS

75. see M. Foucault, "The Subject and Power" in Dreyfus and Rabinow p. 208

thinking of themselves as subjects.[76] 'Governmentality' implies "the relationship of the self to itself, and ...[covers] the range of practices that constitute, define, organize and instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other. I believe that the concept of governmentality makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others - which constitutes the very stuff [*matière*] of ethics."[77] Kant's Enlightenment, modernist framework or paradigm of agency is that of an autonomous, self-motivating self. Foucault states that this is not an intuitive, inherent or given condition for the possibility of understanding. It is a historically constructed and defining *dispositif*.

As methodologies of coping (knowledge *qua* reduction, classification, instrumentalization, commodification), 'technologies of domination' prescribe frameworks or limits for subjects in the world. Subjectivity and agency are constructed by participant knowledge apparatuses (*dispositifs*). How one takes oneself as public or private agent is defined in terms of the knowledge practices which correlate power relations of truth to ethical and political frameworks. The study of those limits or frameworks consists in the analysis of the procedures through which we are produced as subjects. *Dispositifs* constitute the processes of what Foucault calls *assujettissement*, or 'subjectivization.' Forms of subjectivity are delineated within the 'truth-games' set in play by knowledge apparatuses. Subjectivization is a complex of procedures by which one comes to think of oneself as a subject.

The public/private distinction does not maintain, for Foucault, the semantic importance Kant necessitates of just such a distinction, for Foucault makes neither a metaphysical assumption about a subject distinct from the world, nor the internal methodological connection of reason realizing subjective freedom. Foucault sees the "private self" as a site for political contestation. This self is both the effect and the enduring, re-enforcing presence of the socio-political forces that constitute and shape us as individual subjects. Socio-political institutions mould subjects within disciplines of normalization. These "normalized" subjects help to reconstitute and sustain those institutions. Institutions depend for their

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76. TS., p. 19

77. M. Foucault, "Governmentality"*The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Burchell, Gordon, and Miller eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991)pp. 102-3

animation on subjects whose actions maintain the conditions for the apparatuses' possibility. Foucault thus problematizes the normalized self through a critical attention to transfiguring the historical limits (a 'limit-attitude') of *asseujettissement.* His attack is aimed at transfiguring the essential underpinnings of disciplinary *dispositifs* which prescribe necessary limits of human subjectivity.

Foucault proposes reconvening critique's radical practice of questioning in an "experimental ...critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as a work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings."[78]

> This critique will ... not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do or think. It is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom."[79]

For Foucault, as for Nietzsche, knowledge is already a form or expression of the will to power. Foucault's use of the term *volonté de savoir* denotes a relationship between will to power, will to truth and 'knowledge', the latter being the constitutive lens through which power and truth resolve the world. Knowledge discursively 'represents' this or that. 'By picking out what to emphasize and what to represent positively or negatively, knowledge shapes the world it describes.' Knowledge is the product of practices and a practice in itself. It is accomplished by events and itself accomplishes tasks; not in the sense of a continuous development or an intended outcome, but as part of the complex, discontinuous and contingent events of material history.[80] Genealogy engages its political critique through examining the effects and workings of power as a productive practice. By examining power's production of truth, and vice versa, Foucault's philosophical mandate was to engage in a "cultural diagnosis" of the processes through which the present arrives at its uneasy ground. As his diagnostic engagement problematizes and challenges

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78. WE. p. 47

79. ibid. p. 46

80. M. Foucault, "The Order of Discourse" 'Appendix' to *The Archaeology of Knowledge* trans. Rupert Swyer (New York: Pantheon 1972). Also, see John Ransom, *Foucault's Discipline* p. 19.

traditional modes of enframing our construction of the present, so too within his diagnostic challenge new possibilities are allowed to arise.[81]

The question , of course, is: how can a diagnostic challenge to traditional methods and productions of truth and subjectivity generate "new possibilities" by 'separating out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do, or think?' How can we refuse what we are if we do not have a position or ground from which to argue for such a refusal? Does Foucault not owe us a criterion by which to measure which forms of danger pose the most risk? He has made it clear that appeals to universal reason, human nature and traditions are not viable. How then do we address this apparent confusion? Foucault's response cuts to the quick of how his work challenges present modes of thinking.[82]

IV. The Problem of Legitimacy

The frequent objection to Foucault's critique is that a lack of critical standards results in the impossibility of grounding otherwise interesting insights. Foucault's work is thus seen to be born on the back of "incoherence" and "performative contradiction." There are two primary reasons for this view. First, there is an all too often impatient and less than careful reading of Foucault's work given by busy detractors. The second, more interesting, reason (though no less revealing) is the pious philosophical presumption that a theoretical justification or ground is a necessary condition for the possibility of rational critique. Again we see the transcendental epistemic driving the perception of what constitutes adequacy for philosophy and thought proper. I would like to show how this criticism completely mis-addresses Foucault's claims, and therefore is not a criticism at all.

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81. "... the diagnosis does not establish the fact of our identity by the play of distinctions. It establishes that we are difference, that our reason is the difference of our discourses, our history the difference of our times, our selves the difference of our masks. That difference, far from being the forgotten and recovered origin [Foucault contra Heidegger and Sartre] is the dispersion that we are and make." Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (Pantheon Books: New York, 1972) p. 131

82. These concerns have been written about voluminously. Three authors have done so in an especially clear fashion: John Ransom pp. 18-25, and pp. 171-178; Richard J. Bernstein "Foucault: Critique as a Philosophic Ethos" *The New Constellation* (MIT Press: Cam., Mass 1992)pp.142-171: and T. Carlos Jacques, "Whence does the Critic Speak?" *Philosophy and Social Criticism* No. 4, Vol. 17 (1991) pp. 325-344

Traditionally, a criticism is considered rational if the standards it appeals to are objective. Objectivity is considered a necessary condition of evaluation. In this rational framework, power, a concept central to Foucauldian genealogy, has been seen as something inherently negative. Alleviate the repressive conditions, and unencumbered reason will lead you to truth. To alleviate repressive conditions we must appeal, it is supposed, to standards and norms outside of power relations. If we cannot appeal to outside norms or standards, as Foucault argues, how can we be justified in our criticism? Isn't the suggestion of objective impossibility just an embrace of relativism? Don't we need normative frameworks, which if not objective, have certain common cognitive correlates evidenced by speech and or socially shared situations? Habermas and his like minded critics certainly think so. Habermas, Nancy Fraser and Charles Taylor have provided the most focused and coherent criticisms of Foucault on just these grounds.

Foucault's genealogy challenges the notion that the critical attitude of questioning and refusal needs to make claims either about human nature or freedoms of "public reason" necessary in bringing latent or emergent conditions to realization. His use of the term 'power-knowledge' communicates the idea that knowledge produces and reflects power relations.

> [T]here is no power relation without the constitution of a field of knowledge that does not pre-suppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These 'power-knowledge' relations are to be analyzed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. ... It is not the activity of the subject of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the process and struggles that transverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.[83]

Foucault's example of the Panopticon reveals a discursive and practical process of subjective production. Bentham's prison design was revolutionary in that it allowed the observation of inmates from a central location without the watcher or guard himself being seen. Indeed, it produced in inmates the perception that they were always under surveillance, whether they were or not. But more than a means of local control, the panopticon was a useful device for collecting data and information on how imprisoned subjects behaved and lived. Surveillance information was then used to refine the efficiency and

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83. *Discipline and Punish*, p. 27-8

deliverability of behavioral controls, and so increase the productive management of these subjects. The justification for punitive incarceration is still couched in the humanist terms re-education, reformation, and rehabilitation. There is a very specific agenda of normalization behind the subjective production of prisoners. These productive reforms are not without their dangers.[84] But, the agendas, perspectives, and normalization effects of these reforms are masked by the discourse of objectivity which is promoted both by the intervention of well-meaning professionals and the physical environment of the prison itself. Foucault uses the prison as a particularly conducive example of the apparatuses of power-knowledge which operate within many modern institutions. Other examples of these institutionalized apparatuses are schools, hospitals, the military, and, to an increasing extent, the university.

But, claim the critics, if subjects and systems of meaning are determined by power-knowledge technologies, and a critique of these systems necessarily entails an appeal to standards or norms not conditioned by these systems, then, how is any critique possible? Do we not need normative criteria? Habermas' complaints communicate this worry.

> Foucault,...replaces the model of domination based on repression (developed in the tradition of enlightenment by Marx and Freud) by a plurality of power strategies. These power strategies intersect one another, succeed one another; they are distinguished according to the type of their discursive formation and the degree of their intensity; but they cannot be judged under the aspect of their validity.[85]

In other words, Habermas claims that Foucault denies the critical theorist any ability to determine the merits of a specific discursive formation; and therefore, judgement is impossible.

> Foucault cannot adequately deal with the persistent problems that come up in connection with an interpretive approach to the object domain, a self-referential denial of universal validity claims, and normative justification for critique. ... This suppression of basic concepts that could take into

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84. see *Discipline and Punish* pp. 195-228. Huxley's and Orwell's futurist novels explored similar ideas. But, of course, the Fordian landscape of efficiency continues to flatten lived experience in every facet of modern daily life. Witness the cultures of experts, risk and efficiency which define the control and management of lived experience through opinion polls, psychological and standardized testing, workplace surveillance, directed marketing, the profusion of "safety" initiatives under the banners of health and education, etc... . Part of Foucault's philosophical honesty was to just say that more than power being repressive (he never denied that it was), power is a far more complex phenomenon than the repressive hypothesis suggests - see: *History of Sexuality Vol.1*, p. 11; *Power/ Knowledge*, p. 119; "The Minimalist Self," *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p.9; and *Foucault Live*, pp. 138-40)

85. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 127

> account the symbolic pre-structuring of action systems burdens his empirical research with problems that...Foucault does not address.[86]

Nancy Fraser speaks of the above problems in terms of 'normative confusion.'[87] She claims that such confusion arises in the conceptual ambiguities of Foucault's understanding of power. For Foucault, power is productive, not repressive. Its influence on the subject is such that it could be both neutral and actively engaged in some facet of subjective production. The problem Fraser identifies with Foucault's designation of power, is that he does not equivocate amongst various forms of power.

> The problem is that Foucault calls too many different sorts of things power, and simply leaves it at that,...but it doesn't follow that all forms of power are normatively equivalent nor that any social practices are as good as any other. Indeed, it is essential to Foucault's own project that he is able to distinguish better from worse sets of practices and forms of constraint. But this requires greater normative resources than he possesses.[88]

Elsewhere, she bluntly expresses her worry in the form of a compelling question:

> Why is struggle preferable to submission? Why ought domination to be resisted? Only with the introduction of normative notions of some kind could Foucault begin to answer this question. Only with the introduction of normative notions could he begin to tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it.[89]

The consequences of not having adequate normative grounds from which to commence a critique are twofold: irrationality and incoherence, and an entrapment in power formations.[90] Taylor suggests that Foucault's critique is incoherent because it affirms a "good" (freedom), yet denies the possibility of any sort of critical appeal as to how such a good might guide action. If we cannot make such an appeal, then we are trapped within the apparatuses which we criticize and yet wish to escape. Habermas suggests that Foucault ends up 'totalizing critique' within the plurality of this entrapment.

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86. ibid., Lecture X, p. 286

87. Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1989)p. 31

88. ibid., p. 32

89. Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions" *Praxis International 1* (1981) p. 283

90. Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth", *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1986); and Fraser's "Michel Foucault: A 'Young Conservative?' *Critique and Power* ed. M. Kelly (MIT Press: Cam., Mass., 1994)

> Genealogy is overtaken by a similar fate to that which Foucault had seen in the human sciences: to the extent that it retreats into the reflectionless objectivity of a non-participatory, ascetic description of kaleidoscopically changing practices of power, genealogical historiography emerges from its cocoon as precisely the *presentistic*, *relativistic*, *cryptonormative* illusory science that it does not want it to be.[91]

These are interesting, yet revealing, arguments. In defending genealogy from its critics, I would like to highlight two significant effects engaged by the criticisms we see above. First, these criticisms fail to take into account how Foucault's observations about the creative aspects of power challenge traditional oppositional distinctions. If he is right about essentially productive aspects of power-knowledge, what does this entail for our continuing to understand the critical project in terms of subject/object relations, repression/emancipation, and rationality/irrationality? If Foucault is right about some empirical effects and productions of power (as Fraser acknowledges), how do these insights affect the frameworks and vision of what traditionally constitutes critique - namely epistemic delineation? Secondly, it is assumed by Taylor's charge of entrapment that the power/knowledge sign Foucault invokes is a relationship of identity; that they can be reduced to one another. Foucault is adamant that he does not conceptualize either power or knowledge as reducible to one another.

> [W]hen I read - and I know it has been attributed to me - the thesis 'knowledge is power,' or 'power is knowledge,' I begin to laugh, since studying their *relation* is precisely my problem. If they were identical, I would not have to study them,...The very fact that I pose the question of their relation proves clearly that I do not identify them.[92]

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault does distinguish between "violence" and "power." The former he describes as physical and bodily harm: chains, leg irons, beatings, slavery, etc... . The latter is constitutive of those discursive apparatuses which work on how subjects see themselves, rather than an explicitly physical force. Power apparatuses are ones which determine public reason and goods, as at the same time they prescribe subjective reflexivity, through an investigation of what constitutes knowledge and truth. In a sense Foucault turns the Enlightenment's theoretical continuum on its head. Since Descartes and Kant the effort has been first to define the possible conditions of knowledge, and then to move on, confident in one's 'discrimination apparatus,' to pass judgement on the important things in life, morality, ethics, and how we

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91. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Lecture X, p. 275-76

92. "Critical Theory/Intellectual History" *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* p. 43

live with one another. Foucault suggests a more complex context, in which knowledge is already in and of itself engaged in the ethical practices of communication and self creation. And it is not that some theoretical activity assumes more importance than the other, but that any critical engagement implicates a plurality of practices. To make separations based on importance is to make artificial delineations, and to further call them natural, is an anthropocentric conceit.

Foucault's use of the power-knowledge sign is an attempt to re-work the perspective of legitimation in a manner that exposes political possibilities at the same time as it attempts to re-figure apparatuses of truth: "those precise rationalities and bodies of knowledge that have played a crucial role in forming individuals and the social structures they inhabit."[93] Genealogy thus allows for the development of a perspective not possible by delineative strategies of natural necessity.

Fraser's and Habermas' appeals to norms and criteria are appeals to essential qualities of human beings which, ostensibly, need to be enhanced and protected. But Foucault means something very different by norms. Norms, for Foucault, are productive tools which shape how subjects are governed, and how they see themselves. They are empowered developments of knowledge claims about what the human subject is and can be. Habermas' and Fraser's appeals to norms necessarily entail an appeal to a constant, empirical, and universalizable model of either subjectivity or interaction. Foucault, however, argued a) that relations of forces constantly change a plurality of epistemes in terms of which subjects see themselves, b) subjectivity and individuality are not essential descriptions - they too are malleable and very recent ideas - and c) freedom is thus not an inherent emancipation as a result of secured inalienable rights or responsibilities; it is the work of critical engagement.

V. Critique as a Philosophical Ethos

Foucault expects something very different from the work of thought. Truth and universalizability are not his goals. He wants to expose the traditional understandings of key concepts to the 'dark ambiguities,' the grey morass of pluralities and complex influences which have produced our present.

> [I]t is accepted as a certainty that Foucault, adhering...to a certain notion of literary production, got rid of purely and simply, the notion of the subject: no more oeuvre, no more author, no more

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93. Ransom, p. 24

> creative unity. But things are not that simple. The subject does not disappear; rather its excessively determined unity is put in question. ... Similarly, when one ascribes to Foucault a quasi-nihilist distrust of what he calls the will to truth (or will to serious knowledge), or additionally, a suspicious rejection of the idea of reason (possessing universal value), I think one is underestimating the complexity of his concerns. The will to truth, to be sure, but at what cost? What are its guises? What political imperatives are concealed beneath that highly honourable quest?[94]

To criticize Foucault for not absolving the complexities and ambiguities of philosophical problems like subjectivity and truth is to force on his work a framework of critical expectation he spent his life's work problematizing. The typical form that the denunciation of his refusal takes is, as he suggested, a form of "Enlightenment blackmail."[95] Very simply, the blackmail forces Foucault to either defer to standards transcendentally justified, or accept the ignoble label of anti-humanist, nihilist, relativist, and irrationalist. Foucault refuses to accept this 'either/or' position. His critics charge him with something which, not only does he not do, but something which he works continually to problematize and complexify. He does not defend a "positivist" position of cool apathy as Habermas suggests.[96] Instead he explicitly reiterates the need for the work of critique to exist as a "permanent re-activation" and "continual engagement." The work of critique is never over, neither in the pragmatic acceptance of a specific truth, nor in some ideal realm of counterfactuals. And he appeals to a modernist tradition to show how such a work is possible; that what we have taken for granted as the work of philosophy since Descartes and Kant needs to be re-thought; that the conditions of knowledge not depend on the renunciation of power; that we can think and cope differently with what the world has become.

Habermas is correct is saying that Foucault is driven by the "passions of aesthetic modernism."[97] But each thinker operates with radically different conceptions and expectations about what modernity means, and what one might expect to be entailed by modern thought and critique.

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94. Maurice Blanchot, "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him" *Foucault/Blanchot* (Zone Book: New York, 1987) pp. 78-9

95. WE., p. 42-3

96. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 275

97. ibid.

> Modern man...is not man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and hidden truth; he is a man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'; it compels him to face the task of producing himself.[98]

> For modern thought, there is no possible morality...thought is itself an action - a perilous action.[99]

The criticisms proffered against Foucault's genealogical critique in the name of normativity reveal a significant difference between what either side takes as the work of the thinker or philosopher. Foucault explains this difference by referring to Antonio Gramsci's distinction between "universal intellectuals" and "specific intellectuals." Gramsci promoted the notion that an intellectual was a representative figure whose work it is to articulate, and so represent, a standpoint to the world, intellectuals themselves being the obvious instantiation of a specific critical sense.[100] Intellectuals, Gramsci noted, could represent frameworks in one of two ways. One way is to be the 'bearer of universal values.' A 'universal intellectual' works to represent universal tenets of truth and justice. They claim a unique facility and/or capacity to know (either through sagacity, good training, consummate ability, etc..) how best to structure the practices of living. The universal intellectual is not unlike Foucault's description of the 'traditional' or 'Platonic historian' - one whose appeals to the nature of rationality give one insight into the true nature of the world.

The 'specific intellectual' is, in contrast, the representative figure who no longer speaks as the master of truth and justice. The 'specific intellectual' self-consciously occupies a specific position, yes, but whose specificity is linked to the general functioning of an apparatus of truth.[101] Foucault considers the specific intellectual to be one whose work points out the 'assumptions' and 'unconsidered practices' upon which our present rests. The specific intellectual is an 'effective historian.' This effective historian is a gadfly in the face of the status quo, for it is their work to disrupt the universalist chimeras of origin and

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98. WE., p. 42

99. *Les mots et les choses* p. 339 as quoted in John Rajchman "Foucault: the ethic and the work" *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, ed. and trans. Tim Armstrong (Routledge: New York 1992) p. 218

100. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (Vintage: New York, 1994) p. 11

101. Foucault, "Truth and Power" p. 132

evidence. The specific intellectual's activity is itself the vocational art of representation. The emphasis for the specific intellectual is the work of the thinking itself, rather than the general results for societal or rational progression.

Foucault considered himself to be a 'specific intellectual.' His disavowal of the universalizable methodologies of the expert does not entail that he, as a specific intellectual, does not work from a specific domain or context. Foucault can be said to have grounds, norms, and standards. They are those specific apparatuses with which he engages his present. But these specific standards do not claim universalizability. They can only be thought of as contextual. "I work in a specific field and do not produce a theory of the world. Even if, in practice, whenever one works in a particular field, one can do so only by having or arriving at a particular point of view... ."[102]

The different expectations of theory and philosophy between Foucault and his critics should be quite obvious. To maintain the need for standards, and to blame Foucault for being "incoherent" is to replicate the same slippage between critique as question, and critique as transcendental legitimation that Foucault identifies as characterizing Kant's work. This is not to say that critique is therefore incoherent. It is to say that the work critique can do is much more local, much more limited, but also much more free. As a limit attitude, the ethos of critique accepts a malleability and plurality for thought for whom the horizon of possibility is constantly shifting.

> There is an optimism that consists in saying that things couldn't get any better. My optimism would consist rather in saying that so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances than necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary historical circumstances than with the inevitable anthropological constants...You know, to say that we are much more recent than we think isn't a way of taking the whole weight of history on our shoulders. It's rather to place at the disposal of the work that we can do on ourselves the greatest possible share of what is presented to us as inaccessible.[103]

The ambiguity of thought that Foucault foregrounds threatens the traditional confidences of modernity and the arrogances within a humanist resolve. If this means that the picture of our lives looks more bleak, so be it. But it also means that we can still try to change, transform and challenge ourselves and our vested

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102. Foucault, "On Power" *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* pp. 108

103. Foucault, "Practicing Criticism" *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* p. 156

ways of coping. One of the most revealing statements Foucault ever made presents the ambiguity of our present before us:

> I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by another people. You see, what I want to do is not the history of solutions, that is why I do not accept the word *alternative*. I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problematiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same thing as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.[104]

Foucault's use of the term "danger" is very similar to Levinas' use of the same term in *Totality and Infinity*. Danger expresses a potentiality of creative options, wherein the critical work for thought is "...at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them." This process is tenuous and uncertain. To impose on it a certainty is to limit us to a closed set of possibilities and creative responses. It is to paint by numbers. Such thinking replicates the slippage Kant inaugurated and totalizes critique.

Modernity, Foucault argues, is an ambiguous tension between the curiosity and the question of the new and those perspectives which elaborate a known. To limit us to standards and epistemic criteria is to close off the creative curiosity, care and concern an ethos of questioning as the work of thought experiences in confronting the world.[105] "Ethos" means "abode" or "dwelling."[106] It is within an ethos of critique as concern for a fugitive openness to the world that Foucault cultivates an ethics of existence. In the fractures and dissonances generated by his critique, the work of thinking thought against itself creates meaning and opens possibilities for man to face the unfamiliar or Other.

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104. GE., p. 231-32

105. "As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity - the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself." UP., p. 8

106. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" *Basic Writings* (Harper: San Francisco, 1977)p. 236. I think Foucault would echo the saying of Heraclitus: *ethos anthropoi daimon* - "The abode is for man the open region for the presencing of god (the unfamiliar one)."

Part IV

The Ethics of an Historical Aesthetics

It may well be true that one has to choose between ethics and aesthetics, but it is no less true that, whichever one chooses, one will always find the other at the end of the road. For the very definition of the human condition should be in the *mise-en-scène* itself.

Jean-Luc Godard

> You have to worry about your soul - that is the principle activity of caring for yourself. The care of the self is the care of the activity and not the care of the soul-as-substance.
>
> M. Foucault

I began this project as an attempt to clarify for myself Foucault's puzzling claim that one could create of one's life a work of art. That is, an ethical response to the totalizing model of Enlightenment morality can be constituted through philosophical critique and yet without any relation to an external law as juridical per se.[1] Foucault suggests that the ethical life is not solely a matter of living in accordance with a code (criteria set out in advance of action to guide and judge it), but also entails a creatively engaged responsiveness to others. An "aesthetics of existence" is a cultivated attitude to being, and is at least as important as the assemblage of reasons and principles in a moral code.[2] Moreover, in attending to the possibility of creative responses as practices of living, central Enlightenment notions of subjectivity and freedom can be re-thought in a much less deterministic guise.

There was something compelling in this suggestion, but it entailed attempting to figure out both the workings of Foucault's philosophical critique and what his critique meant for the exercise and practice of thought. As such, I have tried to trace a line of thinking that Foucault's work exposes: from the political openness of critique as an attention to the question of the present, through genealogy, showing how critique can problematize the "idea of an analytical or necessary link between ethics and our other social or economic or political structures,"[3] to what one can honestly expect from philosophical critique: a radically less totalizing vision than the one traditionally practiced by Enlightenment methodologies.

But the question remains:

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1. GE., p. 235

2. see Jane Bennett's wonderful essay "'How is it then, that we still remain barbarians?': Foucault, Schiller, and the Aestheticization of Ethics" *Political Theory* Vol. 24 No. 4 November 1996 p. 655. Bennett's essay has been an invaluable guide in helping me to understand Foucault's work. It was also helpful in structuring the present section.

3. GE., p. 236

> [W]hat kind of ethics can we build now, when we know that between ethics and other structures there are only historical coagulations and not a necessary relation?

Foucault responds:

> What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? ... From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art. ... I would like to say...we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has with himself - which has the form of authenticity or inauthenticity - but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity.[4]

Let us consider his suggestion.

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In our late modern culture, varyingly objectivizing modes of inquiry have created both discourses of truth and subjects of those discourses. Foucault's work was concerned, primarily, with three modes of inquiry which continue to produce how subjects come to think of themselves, both as objects for thought and as reflexively self-aware subjects.[5] The first of these modes are those inquiries that claim the status of sciences: natural history, biology, economics, sociology, linguistics, etc.,. These practices engage an analytic of finitude in positing hierarchical, conceptual relationships of dependence whose implications entail universality. Standards of objectivity test the viability of limit claims. For the life sciences, 'true subjectivity' is accessible only through viable descriptions of lived experience. The second mode of inquiry Foucault studied were those practices that resulted from the theoretical prescriptions of these objectivizing sciences. Forms of inquiry which make the subject an object of a specific practice of thought Foucault termed "dividing practices."[6] Dividing practices delineate the acceptable from the unacceptable and so distinguish subjects from others: the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the deviant and the normal, the poor and the wealthy, the criminal and the good citizen. A third mode of objectivisation concerns how, as a result of the interactions of the wills to knowledge and truth, people come to think of themselves as

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4. ibid., p. 236-7

5. Foucault, "The Subject and Power" p. 208

6. ibid.

subjects; in other words, how a subject objectifies herself, through discourses of truth and power, to others and to herself.

Objectivizing orders of discourse were engaged through what Foucault has identified as *la volonté de savoir*. We have seen how the will to know has, in the post-Kantian anthropological tradition, attempted to prescribe necessary conditions for possible thought and experience. We have also seen how genealogy works to problematize the will to know. Genealogy's point of departure in focusing on the will to know is the power-knowledge complex. The indefinite, contingent, plurality of struggles within the history of this will are the fulcrum for genealogy's unmasking the technologies of power and the will to knowledge in objectivizing discourse.[7] *Discipline and Punish* and *Will to Know*, the first volume of *History of Sexuality* are exemplars of this genealogical critique. If genealogy can be said to have a goal, it is to challenge both the maxim of a stable human essence the sciences of man take as their objective, and the ways in which people are made to think of themselves as subjects under the rubric of these essentialized parameters.

> In contrast to the various projects which aim to inscribe knowledges in the hierarchical order of power associated with science, genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledge from that subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse.[8]

Genealogy provides a means by which subjects can come to understand their own freedom to transfigure these determining conditions; yet, in refusing to provide an alternative set of prescriptive criteria, the critical work is situated in an open-ended dispersion of creative possibility. Genealogy's rejection of modernity's essentializing conceit does not preclude speaking truths about the world and human beings, as detractors' criticisms often suggest. No, genealogy insists only on reflexively communicating the particularities in terms of which statements are made.

Much of the force of Foucault's critique is contained in the paradoxical tension between its radical questioning and the refusal to offer legitimatizing alternatives to problems that are opened by its sceptical

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7. see *History of Sexuality Vol. I*, p. 12

8. Foucault, "Two Lectures" *Power/Knowledge* p. 85

critique. John Rajchman sees this tension as constitutive of both the freedom of Foucault's thinking and the reactivation of an experimental philosophical ethos which takes nothing for granted.

> To question the self-evidence of a form of experience, knowledge or power, is to free it for our purposes, to open new possibilities for thought and action. Such freedom is the ethical principle of Foucault's scepticism.[9]

In the early eighties, as his work increasingly took him to America, Foucault came to consider genealogy as a form of 'historiographic nominalism.'[10] This form of nominalism posits that each of the 'facts' of history is only meaningful within the context of its eruption. Foucault borrowed this idea from his friend and colleague, Paul Veyne, who describes a nominalist notion of history as "not scientist but sublunary."[11] Genealogy can speak of history only in a manner which emphasizes the historical fact's embeddedness within "its own plot and with reference to an indefinite number of plots."[12] There is a certain 'flattening' of experience with this "negative"[13] project of nominalizing thought and history. The depth grammar of the traditional scientific anthropology of origins described by a philosophy of consciousness is problematized by approaching the history of thought as a history of the problems of locality and singularity. Problems, and answers to problems, are only meaningful within specific discursive contexts. Genealogy is "a question of a movement of critical analysis in which one tries to see how different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also how these different solutions result from a specific form of problematization."[14] Genealogy is nominalist in the sense that it only claims to attend to the

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9. John Rajchman, *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1985) p. 4

10. Foucault, "Preface to *The History of Sexuality*, Volume Two", *Essential Works Vol. One: Ethics*, p. 200; see also "Introduction", *Essential Works Vol. Two: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, p. xxxvii and Rajchman's *Freedom of Philosophy* wherein he emphasizes Foucault's historical nominalism.

11. Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology* (Wesleyan University Press: Middleton, Conn. 1984)p. 42, as quoted in "Introduction" Vol. 2 of *Essential Works*, p. xxxvii

12. ibid.

13. Foucault, "Preface to *The History of Sexuality,Vol. 2* "in *Essential Works Vol. 1*, p. 200

14. Foucault, "Polemics, Politics and Problematizations: An Interview" *The Foucault Reader* p. 389

plurality of these discursive relations as events rather than to the depth of an 'unthought,' an 'unsaid,' or an 'objective' reality.

> We must conceive discourses as a violence we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them; and it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity.[15]

Thought, then, is the care or attention paid to the activity, exercise or work, of freely asking questions, rather than it is some determinate and necessarily bound function of describing substance or a natural kind. The work, or exercise, of thought is a care for the activity itself. It is a freedom to attend to the exercise of the self in thought, in which critique refuses the hegemony of totality.

> Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem.[16]

What then does this explicit claim of nominalism entail for the ways in which we might come to think of the subject as a politically engaged, ethically motivated, mode of being? How is Foucault asking us to challenge the ways we have come to think of ourselves as subjects and agents? Does subjectivity continue to carry any meaning at all; and if transfigured, can we continue to think of ourselves as ethically responsible to others and ourselves?

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Foucault locates within the classical period's increasingly critical-hermeneutical split of reason and faith (the "laicization of obedience"[17]), an expansion of two necessarily connected discursive representations (forms of knowledge): the rise of individualism and an expansion into civil society of methods and arts (*ars*

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15. Foucault, "The Order of Discourse" *Language and Politics*, M. Shapiro, ed. (Blackwell: Oxford, 1984) p. 127. I think Foucault is overzealous in saying that thought is a violence we do to things. Some thought is, but much is not. It is easy with statements such as these to understand Fraser's worry about needing to differentiate, in this case, worse forms of violence from better. If we attend to practices as "dangerous," that is, fraught with ambiguities of potentiality, no matter how well intentioned and thought out, we will be closer to the position, I think, Foucault on second reflection would espouse.

16. "Polemics, Politics, Problematizations" p. 388

17. WC., p. 384

artium) for governing specific populations (children, women, families, the sick, the poor, etc...). "The main characteristic of our political rationality is the fact that the integration of individuals in a community or in a totality results from a constant correlation between an increasing individualization and the re-inforcement of this totality."[18]

The concern for *how best to govern* was the central question and preoccupation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[19] Knowledge, and the confidence in reason's provision of truth, oriented critique's answers to the questions of civil society in terms of the problem of certainty in the face of authority. As such, critique was simultaneously implicated in the processes of delineation and questioning. Solutions to the problem of how best to govern were developed within frameworks which presupposed the rational adjudication of limits corresponding to progressive rationalizations of politics and morality. 'The philosophical discourse of modernity' has been erected around the problem of attempting to raise oneself into a transcendental, rational and normative republic, while at the same time preserving a feeling of community within the context of modern reason.[20]

Yet, alongside the epistemic will for answers to the questions of *how best to govern*, governmentality and pedagogy contiguously appropriate, within themselves, the critical movement as a questioning imperative - namely, "how not to be governed like that, in the name of those principles and objectives, by means of such methods,...?"[21] Foucault asserts that as a counterpart, "at once partner and adversary of the arts of government," critique operates as an ethical and political attitude of resistance. Critique cannot be dissociated from the question of *how not to be governed*. "'Not wanting to be governed' is, of course, not accepting as true what an authority tells you to be true, or at least it is not accepting it as true because an authority tells you that it is true. Rather, it is to accept it only if one thinks oneself that

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18. Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals", *Technologies of the Self*, Martin, Gutman, Hutton eds., (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1988) p. 161-2

19. WC., p. 384 - I think it is, more than ever, the central question of our late modern society.

20. John Rajchman, "Foucault: the ethic and the work" p. 218

21. WC., p. 384

the reasons for accepting it are good."[22] Critique thus manifests itself through an attitude of freely attempting to think differently by posing questions of the way things are. Critique is a certain freedom of practice in relation to what one does, whereby one can pose a question or problem and so change the givens of a problem. It is an open, sceptical exercise of refusal.

Foucault invokes a 'preliminary definition' of critique as the "art of not being governed so much" and identifies as part of its general cultural form, a "critical attitude" 'that marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task.'[23] The modern concern for government constitutes a dialectical tension between on the one hand, prescribed modes and rationales for acting, and on the other, an attitude that is "at once partner and adversary of the arts of governing, as a way of suspecting,... challenging...limiting... finding their measure, transforming, of seeking to escape these arts of governing."[24] This latter ethos or attitude develops as an ethical relationship one has to one's idea of oneself within the context of questioning . In "The Subject and Power," Foucault describes this tension as a doubling movement which, on the one hand, binds us to statist forms of subjectivity prescribed by the humanist "government of individualization," while emphasizing, at the same time, the critical work of thought on itself in which the possibility of thinking differently can be exercised.

> [T]he political, ethical social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.[25]

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Foucault suggests in the latter two volumes on sexuality that the relationship of the subject to him or herself is a more ambiguous process than the rationalist discourse of codification and prescriptive agency suggests. Individuals and communities are subject to moral codes. They follow rules and values

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22. WC., p. 385

23. ibid.

24. ibid.

25. Foucault, "Subject and Power" p. 216

that recommend themselves to subjects through the institutional intermediaries of the church, state, family, law, etc.[26] Morality, in this sense, constitutes a codified rule following. But, subjects can also be thought to conduct themselves in specific ways in relation to rules and prescriptions. Foucault calls "ethical work" (*travail éthique*) the work people do on themselves in making themselves subjects of these mediaries and discursive practices like sexuality, labour, education, etc... . "[T]here are different ways to 'conduct oneself' morally, different ways for the acting individual to operate, not just as an agent, but as an ethical subject of this action. ...[T]he determination of the ethical substance is the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct."[27] Foucault calls this work on oneself in the practice of thought, "ethics."

Foucault thus distinguishes between 'morality' and 'ethics.' Morality is concerned with codes which regulate conduct. Ethics concerns "the elaboration of a form of relation to self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct."[28] The emphasis on ethics rather than on a legislative ethics of moral codes and prescriptions enables Foucault to raise the question of the practices which form the individual in relation to knowledge, politics and modern law. The point being to study the practices of the self in their own sphere and to question, on this basis, their place in a given society.[29]

Foucault understood an analysis of 'ethics' to be the analysis of the free relationship one had with oneself (*rapport à soi*); that is with those 'practices of the self' in terms of which one constructed oneself as a subject of discursive practices. The goal of studying these 'arts of existence' was to rid ourselves of the long internalization through which we came to think of ourselves as "subjects of desire."[30] He thought that what was needed in our times was a means of thinking differently about our modes of being in ways that were not tied to the normalizing requirements therapeutic models of cure adhered to, nor to the closely

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26. UP., p.25

27. ibid., p.27

28. ibid., p. 251

29. John Rajchman, "Foucault: the ethics and the work" pp. 218-19

30. UP., p. 12

related Christian models of purity and confession.[31] By problematizing, through a genealogical methodology, the epistemic construction of subjectivity as sovereign universal of definable characteristics, he attempted to open up different relationships of thinking about ourselves, others, our thoughts, and pleasures.

As we know, Foucault aligned his own philosophical work with a history of problematizations - "the proper task of a history of thought, as against a history of behaviours and representations: to define the conditions in which human beings 'problematize' what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live."[32] Foucault suggests that the primary way in which the process of this problematizing invention was faced in Greek and Roman times was through the invocation *epimelesthai sautou*, "care for yourself."[33] The care for the self was linked to a group of *techne*, practices or "arts of existence." These arts, or techniques of the self, were "intentional or voluntary actions by which subjects not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also sought to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic value."[34]

Foucault argues that these distinctions have an importance for the consequences of historical analysis. An effective history of "morality" also entails studying relationships with the self, the decipherment of the self by oneself, and the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object. He calls this historical analysis, "...a history of 'ethics' and 'ascetics,' understood as a history of the forms of moral subjectivation and of the practices that are meant to ensure it."[35] Foucault's point is that an action is not moral in its singularity.

> It is also moral in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct. ... A moral action tends toward its own accomplishment; but it also aims beyond the latter, to the establishing of a moral conduct that commits an individual, not only to other actions

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31. see John Rajchman, *Truth and Eros* (Routledge, New York, 1991) p. 95

32. UP., p. 10

33. Foucault, *The Care for the Self* (Vintage: New York 1988) p. 43

34. UP., p. 10-11

35. ibid., p. 29

> always in conformity with values and rules, but to a certain mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject. ... Of course, all moral action involves a relationship with the reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self. The latter is not simply "self-awareness" but self-formation as an 'ethical subject,' a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. There is... no moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of the ethical subject without..."ascetics" or "practices of the self" that support them.[36]

The Use of Pleasure and *The Care for the Self* are examples of Foucault examining the histories of the 'ascetic' practices by which subjects transformed themselves as subjects within specific discourses. Interestingly, his use of the term "ascetic" does not replicate the Christian notion of abnegation; instead it means "an exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being."[37] Practices of the self or 'technologies of the self' might include such things as dietary restrictions, sexual practices, forms of relationship, friendship and marriage, physical exercises, and spiritual exercises like writing and journal keeping. Foucault considers these practices of the self to have been especially important ethical phenomena in Roman and Greek civilizations. "[T]he main emphasis [today] is placed on the moral code, on its systematicity, its richness, its capacity to adjust to every possible case and embrace every area of behaviour." Greek and Roman antiquity "were much more oriented toward practices of the self and the question of *askesis* than toward codifications of conducts and the strict definition of what is permitted and what is forbidden." Foucault describes these "ethics oriented moralities" as those in which:

> ...the strong and dynamic element is to be sought in the forms of subjectification and the practices of the self. ... Here the emphasis is on the forms of relations with the self, on the methods and techniques by which he works them out, on the exercises by which he makes himself as an object to be known, and on the practices that enable him to transform his mode of being.[38]

These *asketes* were important for they were exercises in the possibility of making freedom into a practical and not simply a formal question. "Although the necessity of respecting the law and the customs -

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36. UP., p. 28

37. Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" *The Final Foucault*, Bernauer and Rasmussen, eds. (MIT Press: Cam., Mass. 1987)p. 2

38. UP. p. 29 - 30

the *nomoi* - was very often underscored, more important than the content of the law and its conditions of application was the attitude that caused one to respect them."[39] Christian influences changed the relative importance of these practices by appealing to 'essential' concepts like the soul, original sin, and guilt. Ironically, the self became something which needed to be renounced, even though a description of the natural subject became the basis upon whose confessed description salvation lay. Following external laws became the means to one's salvation. Renouncing the importance of the self in obedience to these laws secured an external freedom. These attitudes developed within a modern emphasis on the will to knowledge. Practices of the self were usurped by frameworks of governmentality (medicine, psychology) wherein moral prescriptions attempted to cohere with descriptions of an essential nature, whether naturalistic or spiritual. Freedom was thus seen as a result of the legislative force of the moral code.

Foucault's work on the forms of critique explicit and implicit in Kant helps to give some framework to showing how this might be possible. At the beginning of *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault contrasts universalizing critical philosophy with a more open kind of critique in which the object of thought is the 'critical work thought brings to bear on itself.' Foucault aligns moral imperatives and codes with those forms of rationality which attempt to transcendentally delineate and prescribe courses of action. He considers the attempt to legitimate these interventions in terms of truth and knowledge ludicrous. As we have seen, critique is not entitled such powers because there is no outside to which one can appeal for justification.

> There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity.[40]

Foucault thinks, though, as we have seen in Part II wherein critique is described as a critical ontology of ourselves, philosophy is entitled to explore "what might be changed in its own thought, through a practice of knowledge that is foreign to it."[41] By opening thought up to difference and the freedom of creativity, we

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39. ibid., p. 31

40. UP., p.9

41. ibid.

can test, experiment, or assay different modes of being, ones which do not replicate the exclusions of totalizing or legislative critique.

> The "essay" - which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not in the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication - is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, ie. an "ascesis," *askesis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.[42]

A constant calling into question of the present characterizes this *askesis*. It is in the best sense, a 'limit-attitude,' for it continually examines the present and the limits surrounding the present. In this examination new possibilities are opened up and limits transfigured.

> The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us with the possibility of going beyond them.[43]

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Kant's texts on Enlightenment were important for Foucault because they introduced into the modernist grammar the importance of studying the specificities of the present, rather than being overtly concerned with universals. And it is within his attention to the present that Foucault reads Kant's work as being similarly concerned with the creative work of thought on itself as a limit-attitude.[44] Kant turned to the present in an effort to see how the limits might be refigured and so transcended. But, claims Foucault, Kant attempted to enlighten by invoking an appeal to indubitable limits, and so the critical attention to the present was ignored in favour of rationally discovered conditions for the possibility of mature lived experience. Foucault tries to resurrect the limit-attitude and rewrite modernity as an open and experimental attitude in which critique is "always in a position of beginning again."[45] The capacity to always reflect on limits and so transfigure them is, for Foucault, one of a free and creative interplay of games of truth, and is

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42. ibid.

43. WE., p. 50

44. ibid., p. 45

45. ibid., p. 47

thus ethical. "As a process of constant creative engagement with the given limits of existence, the critical ontology of ourselves is intrinsically ethical. It represents in itself an aesthetics of existence in that the work of thought is not coerced by external law, but is self-judging and self-legislating."[46]

Foucault's work prior to the latter two volumes on sexuality examined the effects of 'bio-power' on the constitution of subjectivity. His vehement descriptions of the nexuses of power-knowledge gave way, in Volumes II and III, to meditations on the management of one's personal existence. What his focus foregrounds is the "last modality of self-formation, that is, the reflective modification of the self, by the self."[47] In turning his attention to "how it was that Western man was led to see himself as a subject of desire[48]" the association of freedom with adherence to right or just law, is complexified with the suggestion that any notion of subjectivity entails both a freedom of creative refusal and an exercise or work on oneself in the activity of thought. Recall Foucault's description of the modern man - "modern man is the man who tries to invent himself." The process of creative invention is an ethical task for Foucault, because it is one in which the critical ontology of the present is engaged in the effort to think differently about the world. It is a process of problematization.

Rainer Rochlitz condemns Foucault for abandoning the project of critiquing technologies of power, and for retreating into the comfort of privileged speculations around an art of living, made "laughable...by the threats of genocide he had brandished in his earlier work."[49] The shift in philosophical attention is not as confusing nor troubling as Rochlitz makes out. Foucault recognized that relations of power are constituted through relations of domination *and resistance*. The ethical relations to the self - those exercises of critical thinking which attempt to transfigure the self in its relations both with itself and to others - are the sites of contestation. Without ethical relations to the self, all power relations would be a matter of

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46. Hutchings, p. 121

47. Bennett, p. 656

48. UP., p. 12

49. Rainer Rochlitz "The Aesthetics of Existence" *Michel Foucault: Philosopher* p. 257

domination because all choices would already be decided according to external or internalized effects of power.[50]

> What is relevant to Foucauldian aesthetics of the self is not any particular beautiful subject but the processes of subjectification as an art. ... [T]he freedom of arts of the self consists not in the self-creation itself but in the experience of self-formation in the face of all the other forces that fashion us. ... 'To abandon self-fashioning is to abandon the craving for freedom, [but] to let go of one's stubborn hold upon self-hood, even self-hood conceived as a fiction is to die.[51]

The modern subject, for Foucault, is one who creates and invents him or herself in the tensions between disciplines of production and the critical questioning freedoms of self-invention. What Foucault is emphasizing is not the subject as an authentic and stable identity, but a fluid and adaptably creative, malleable form.

> The subject is not a substance. The subject is a form, and this form is not at all times and in all places self-identical ... what interests me is precisely the historical constitution of different forms of the subject in relation to truth games.[52]

Thus, the stylizations or techniques a subject practices on him or herself are techniques of empowerment. They:

> permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and a way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality.[53]

Of the critiques we surveyed earlier, the main concern was with criteria of normativity in terms of which we might address the problems of over-determination within power-knowledge apparatuses. Without an appeal to criteria or norms of a legislative variety, Foucault's critique totalizes the subject within a completely determined nexus of construction. Foucault, however, argues that subjects do have a "freedom" of self-invention, and, moreover, that this freedom is necessary for a subject's idea of itself. Freedom and the subjective ethics of exercising oneself in the work of thought are conjoined notions for Foucault.

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50. see Hutchings p. 118

51. Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political* (Routledge: New York 1995) p. 76

52. Foucault, "L'éthique de soi comme une practique de liberté" as quoted in Rajchman, "Foucault: the ethic and the work" p. 219

53. TS., p. 18

Freedom, for Foucault, cannot be the autonomous freedom of the rational will espoused by Kant. In light of his power-knowledge criticisms this would locate Foucault within the apparent ubiquity of power relations. Rather, Foucault locates freedom within the historical critique whose ontology of the present reflexively situates the subject within the 'truth games' of specific rationalities and practices. Unlike Kant's determination of freedom as a transcendence of power, freedom for the subject is experienced at the "outer edges of current regimes of subjectivity."[54] Freedom resides, therefore, in the subject's capacity to think thought against itself and engage in refiguring relationships of truth. The exercise of the ethical work - the exercise of oneself in the work of thought - is shot through, so to speak, with freedom. "Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But the ethics is the deliberate form assumed by freedom."[55] The concept of an ethical structure pre-supposes the free ability to make choices. The ethics of the subject is thus the critical attention to the historical ontology of the present, and the exercise of thought in transfiguring relationships of subjection. The subject is constituted by these practices or exercises. Freedom is practiced within these relationships of empowerment and transgression. It is a continual practice rather than a final release. "I do not think that there is anything that is functionally - by its very nature - absolutely liberating. Liberty is a practice."

> [T]he critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. This philosophical attitude has to be translated into the labour of diverse inquiries. These inquiries...have their practical coherence in the care brought to the process of putting historico-critical reflection to the test of concrete practices. I do not know whether this task still entails faith in Enlightenment; I continue to think that this task requires work on our limits, that is, a patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty.[56]

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Foucault thus leaves open the critical project in practice of testing limits and transfiguring them. An ontological ambiguity is preserved in this openness. The creative activity of "stylizing" one's practices of liberty is free, yes, but these practices communicate dangers of their own. Terry Eagleton and Richard

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54. Bennett, p. 656

55. ECS., p. 4

56. WE., p. 50

Wolin see the dangers of this critical openness as too much for ethics to bear. They accuse Foucault of "aestheticizing" ethics by 'over-extending aesthetic values and analogues,' of reducing the meaning of ethical and political life to a surface play of fetishized stylizations and rhetorical flourishes.

Wolin accuses Foucault of a "pan-aestheticism" - of generalizing a concern for beauty throughout all facets of the conscious world and of vaulting it, as he thinks Nietzsche did, to a position of "world mastery." "Foucault's standpoint favours either an attitude of narcissistic self-absorption or one of outwardly directed, aggressive self-aggrandizement. In neither case is there a discernable trace of human solidarity, mutuality, or fellow feeling. Instead, the ethical universe of aesthetic decisionism is a Hobbesian state of nature - a *bellum omnium contra omnes* - with a flair for style."[57] Wolin worries that an important balance between realms of cognitive, ethical and aesthetic inquiry is lost by Foucault's apparent total stylization of discursive practice. Eagleton's worries trace a similar path. "Truth, the cognitive, becomes a matter of style...turning oneself into an artifact."[58] What worries both Wolin and Eagleton is the preserve of distinct Kantian (and Habermasian) spheres of human inquiry - science, ethics and aesthetics. If we cannot distinguish between specific modes of inquiry on the basis of specific rationalities, how can we be said to effect any legitimate influence, and so make sense of our lives?

These are significant critiques; however, they do not address what is really important about Foucault's critique. Foucault's genealogy of the power-knowledge apparatuses within transcendental inquiry has seriously challenged the possibility of 'distinct logics and hierarchies of values' within autonomous spheres of human inquiry. Wolin and Eagleton attempt to preserve a legislative ethics, whereby the hierarchical autonomy of inquiry justifies legitimizing codes of behaviour. Foucault's work has problematized the exclusionary frameworks within which these forms of thinking demarcate, limit and exert their influence through illusory appeals to transcendental conditions. Again, Foucauldian critique attempts to change our inflated expectations of reason; yet, within the radically curtailed capacities of thought, preserve an ethical freedom of future possibility in invention and change.

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57. Richard Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism" *Telos* No. 67, 1986 p. 74 and 85

58. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Blackwell: New York, 1990) p. 368

But neither does the Foucauldian openness of critique to transfiguration provide solace. Indeed any comfort runs cold when Eagleton asks: "Does it all come down to the question of how one stylizes ones conduct? What would a stylish rape look like, precisely?"[59]

Foucault has left himself open to such troubling questions by his steadfast refusal to offer alternatives.[60] But his work is not indifferent to truth. It just suggests a different task for truth. "Nothing is more inconsistent than a political regime that is indifferent to truth; but nothing is more dangerous than a political system that claims to lay down the truth."[61] What Wolin and Eagleton expect of Foucault is not very different than that expected by Habermas and Fraser; the delineation of a means for prescribing how one ought to behave. Foucault considers the philosopher's work to be a very different activity than that of providing legislative or definitive answers. The specific intellectual's activity is that of truth-telling (*parrhesia*) - a telling that is attentive to the histories and 'fictions' within which truths are both situated and created. The philosopher's work is to engage an *askesis* of thinking thought against itself and so change the givens of a problem.

> The role of the intellectual is not to tell others what they must do. By what right would he do so? Remember all the prophecies, promises, injunctions and programs that intellectuals have managed to formulate over the last two centuries and whose effects we can now see. The work of the intellectual is...through the analyses he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self evident. ... The function of telling the truth must not take the form of the law, just as it would be pointless to believe that it resides by right in the spontaneous interplay of communication. The task of telling the truth is an endless labour: to respect it in all its complexity is an obligation which no power can do without - except by imposing the silence of slavery.[62]

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59. ibid, p. 394

60. At times I wish he would provide some determinate suggestions, if only, in traversing back and forth between a tentative suggestion and a critical openness, to highlight the ambiguity and danger of any position. One alternative might be something similar to Levinas' position of an "ethics as first philosophy." Levinas posited that the ethical relationship between the self and Other was the constitutive tension requisite for thought. Foucault's work might be open to the suggestion of ethics as a first philosophy, wherein the problems of legitimacy and justification do not hinge on epistemic clarity. He must have been aware of Levinas' work as the latter was an esteemed scholar and colleague. But to his detriment, Foucault never mentions Levinas. Nor have I seen any secondary work on the possible relationships between and compatibility of their respective philosophical perspectives.

61. Foucault, "The Concern for Truth" *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* p. 267

62. "The Concern for Truth" ibid., p. 265 - 67

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Foucault's worry is not to expose metaphysical inaccuracy, but rather to investigate how the concrete freedoms of subjectivity are generated and sustained within realms of discursivity and practice. His genealogical analyses of disciplinary practices and sexuality (medical, therapeutic, biological, educational, disciplinary, etc...) discourses attempt to understand how communities and individuals come to construct themselves as subjects and objects of action, and how such constructions are propagated within ever changing networks or constellations (*dispositifs*) of power relations. The self is not something upon which forces act; it, as subjectivity, is the relations of force themselves.

Foucault's drive to rethink subjectivity is simultaneously a re-thinking of ethical responsibility and an accountability for our own actions and our judgments. We are responsible precisely because we cannot be reduced to subjects whose choice is properly constituted by that which comes naturally. Responsibility, for Foucault, is not grounded on a trans-historical or autonomous view of the subject, not on "the marvels of interiority,"[63] but turns towards a critique that reveals not only the danger of such a grounding search, but the danger of any choice at all. Responsibility is just this - the concern for the self's construction and practice as relationally constituted with the other. It is, or is tied to, a practiced philosophic attitude or ethos. It is a work upon oneself, and, as the self is intrinsically dependent on the other, caring for the self constitutes an ontological condition of caring about the other. Within the ethical and practical recognition of oneself as constituted through the other, the open relation to critical work is a work that entails a responsibility for the other.

Responsibility is not anchored through positivity, through a set of moral codes. It negatively achieves freedom from reified codifications by challenging the limits of a system which, through its enforcers, demands positive categorizations of 'natural autonomy.' However, an essential dimension of

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63. Maurice Blanchot, "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him" in *Foucault/Blanchot* trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Zone Books: New York, 1990) p.68. William E. Connolly describes such "marvels" in terms of what he calls "the Augustinian Imperative"-"...the insistence that there is an intrinsic moral order susceptible to authoritative representation. This imperative, in turn, is linked to an obligatory pursuit: the quest to move closer to one's truest self by exploring its inner geography." *The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection of the Politics of Morality*, (Sage Publications: Newbury Park, California 1993)p. xvii

freedom is the extension of the possibilities of thinking. The ambivalence of the question of ethics cannot be naturalized or escaped, because it is the very act of always transfiguring and withstanding what Adorno called, "the pressure of conformity." It may be said to constitute an 'alternative' aesthetic model of ethical freedom and creativity. This responsibility for one's actions is not an imperative fulfilment as in recognizing the affinity to the ordered, moral normal; but, it is care oriented to the other; the other as inevitably created and constructed through practices of distinguishing. Responsibility is a concerned willingness of problematizing curiosity. Foucault writes:

> "I like the word [curiosity]. It evokes 'care'; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and might exist; a sharpened sense of reality but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way..., a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental."[64]

The Foucauldian *askesis* is one of self-transformation within a curious attention to who we are in the present, and thus for those because of whom we can ask, "Who are we, today?" The discourse transforms itself from the positive production of criteria for agency to a process of self-overcoming. It orients itself towards possibilities for transfiguration or resistance within a recognition of contingency and negativity, and as against the perpetual movement of purification that insists on the identity of the same.[65] In so far as this transforming is a work in progress, it is an act of imaginative, creative and practical activity. As Nietzsche recommends, "*One thing is needful.* - To 'give style' to one's character - a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art, and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye."[66] Hence, for Foucault, the concept of an "aesthetics of ethics" :

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64. "The Masked Philosopher" *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy and Culture* ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (Routledge: New York, 1990) p. 328

65. Ladelle McWhorter "Asceticism/Askesis: Foucault's Thinking Historical Subjectivity" in *Ethics and Danger: Essays on Heidegger and Continental Thought*, ed. Arleen B. Dallery and Charles E. Scott with P. Holley Roberts (State U. of N.Y. Press: Albany 1992) p. 253

66. F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Book Four, Section 290, trans. W. Kaufmann, (Random House: New York, 1974) p. 232

> "[Let us] ask which techniques and practices form the Western concept of the *subject*, giving it its characteristic split of truth and error, freedom and constraint. I think that it is here where we will find the real possibility of constructing a history of what we have done and, at the same time, a diagnosis of what we are. This would be a theoretical analysis which has, at the same time, a political dimension. By this word 'political dimension,' I mean an analysis that relates to what we are willing to accept in our world, to accept, to refuse, and to change, both in ourselves and in our circumstances. In sum, it is a question of searching for another kind of critical philosophy. Not a critical philosophy that seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible knowledge of the object, but a critical philosophy that seeks the conditions and *the indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject, of transforming ourselves.*"[67] [emphasis added]

Foucault's work can best be read as embracing the paradoxes and ambiguities of our thought. The ethical work of thought engages in exploring the contradictions and impasses presented to us. Perhaps works of art best express this dangerous practice. Maurice Blanchot says it best:

> Foucault is a man always on the move, alone, secretive, and who, because of that, distrusts the marvels of interiority, refuses the traps of subjectivity, asking where and how there emerges a discourse entirely surface and shimmering, but bereft of mirages - a discourse not alien to the search for truth, as was believed, but one that finally reveals the perils of that search and its ambiguous relations with the myriad configurations of power.[68]

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67. Foucault, "Howison Lectures" given at Berkeley Oct. 20-1, 1980, as found in ct. 4 "About the Beginnings of the Hermeneutics of the Self" p. 223 - 24

62. Blanchot, "Foucault as I Imagine Him" p. 68

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Conclusion

> Such is the ignorance which is taken to be the axiomatic foundation of all knowledge in the human condition: in order to experience yourself as real, you have to suppress the awareness s of your contingency, your unreality, your radical state of need. This you do by creating an awareness of yourself as *one who has no needs that he cannot immediately fulfil.* Basically, this is an illusion of omnipotence: an illusion which the collectivity arrogates to itself, and consents to share with its individual members in proportion as they submit to its more central and rigid fabrications.
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> T. Merton

> [I]n the world of liberalism, man is not weighed down by a history in choosing his destiny. He does not experience the possibilities open to him as a series of restless powers that seethe within him and already push him down a determined path.[...] We must ask ourselves if liberalism is all we need to achieve an authentic dignity for the human subject. Does the subject arrive at the human condition prior to assuming responsibility for the other in the act of election that raises him up to his height?
>
> E. Levinas

Foucault's confrontation with modernity is an enactment of his ethical engagement with the dialectics of modernity's possibilities: his exercise is one of inclusively reading the history of modernity with an honesty becoming its ambivalence. It is not that the Enlightenment is bad, totally. It, like all possibility, manifests danger, potentiality. But, there is no one Enlightenment. "Enlightenment" is the characterization of an amalgam of human strivings, in the most touching (and tragic) of exercises, that of trying to make meaning in the meaningless. The task of an enlightenment which promotes tolerance, understanding, unity, and peace is not inherently evil. It is only that it is nothing inherent. The attempt to describe the ground of the subject who strives to arrive at the condition of being human prior to assuming responsibility for thinking, arrogates to itself the illusion of sole guardian to reason and truth. Reason has for too long been read by the Subject whose own picture of Self has been sustained by a striving prior to responsibility - responsibility for the 'other-as-human' and the 'other-as-nature.'

So the ethic of the intrinsic subject produces an attitude to being (one generated by a striving prior to responsibility) that is not only unreflective, but violent. There are other ways in which to think

ourselves as being-in-the-world. These other ways do not relish an end to thinking, an embrace of the irrational, nor do they redeem a circus of non-sense. The alternate probings which foreground the critical reflection of the question of ethics, and which herein are focused through the lens of Foucault, emphatically try to re-sensate, and render practically responsible the now forgotten relation in whose hands traditional guardians have reified a self's rational transcendence of its concrete attachments. The Enlightenment has thus become problematized through the critique of *one* of its most dominant protectors, the idea of the pre-reflect-ive, identical and rational subject, an idea which has been the machinery of the modernist *telos*.

The Foucauldian methodology instantiates itself as both a critique of the autonomy of the Subject's place in the intensification of power relations, and as an ethical exercise whose instability and movement enacts the possibility of the question, ever challenging itself within the limits of possible discourse. Foucault terms this movement "capabilities." The critical movement is the ethical practice upon oneself; and, the practice is the nomadic and spontaneous "force [power] which moves."[69] When Foucault speaks of "aestheticizing" the ethical, he means that process or exercise on the self as a relational constituent whose possibility is created in the reflected care and responsibility to think the subject as relation. Freedom, "the undefined [and undefinable] work [askesis]of freedom" is a dangerous exercise - "...a patient labour giving form to our impatience for liberty."[70] It is a practice, an *asketes* , of being-in-the-world. It is not a liberation or emancipation from "radical need." It is a facing up to "radical need," a facing wherein the mask of modernity's illusion is removed in the act of honest reflexivity. Indeed, what on Earth could we be emancipated from, but ourselves?

Enlightenment as an end or continuance becomes irrelevant. In Foucault's critique is re-written a narrative plurality, a many that unbinds the notion of modernity's continuity. The question of "Modernity: an Incomplete Project?" maintains its centrality as a focal debate, only because the "transcendent inspiration" to a subject's liberty is revealed as contingent, a construction, a specific practice of non-necessity; and this recognition, for Foucault, entails facing an irresolvable openness. What does happen is

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69. E. Levinas., "Signature" *Research in Phenomenology* Vol. VIII, 1978 p. 183

70. WE., p. 50

that Foucault's philosophical discourse springs away from the "improvement of mankind" by dint of transcendental "idols" towards the present in all its manifestations before us. It "...places within a process of development everything considered immortal in man," [71] and makes freedom a condition of ethics rather than vice versa.

Foucault's ambiguous problematization of modernity is itself a constellation of optimism and pessimism: optimistic in the sense of looking to a freedom of capabilities; pessimistic in the sense that freedom is simply a re-embracing of the concrete dangers that makes transgression possible.[72] If you like, an 'eternal return' of freedom's closed possibility.[73] Foucault has, like Nietzsche, opened a space wherein we can reflect our understanding, or at least a glimmer of recognition, in a place devoted to the beautiful tragedy that philosophy works so hard to silence and continues so vehemently to deny, our complex, practical lives.

I could not agree more with the statement that we think more honestly after Foucault.[74]

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71. Foucault., NGH p. 153

72. "...if we are not to settle for the affirmation or the empty dream of freedom, it seems to me that this historico-critical attitude must also be an experimental one." WE p. 46

73. "...the theoretical and practical experience that we have of our limits and of the possibility of moving beyond them is always limited and determined; thus we are always in the position of beginning again." ibid. p.47 see also - Foucault., *The Birth of the Clinic* (Vintage: New York 1973) trans., A.M. Sheridan Smith, p. xvi : "We are doomed historically to history, to the patient construction of discourses about discourses, and to the task of hearing what has already been said."

74. Garth Gillan, *The Final Foucault* (MIT Press: Cam. Mass., 1987)p. 43

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